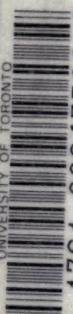


THE LUMBER ROOM'

AND OTHER SHORT PLAYS.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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CATHERINE BELLAIRS GASKOIN.



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THE
LUMBER ROOM
AND OTHER PLAYS

BY
CATHERINE BELLAIRS GASKOIN

LONDON
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Fickle Juliet.

Them Banns.

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THE LUMBER ROOM

(Scene : *An almost empty lumber room, the few things in it all covered with dust sheets, except a box or small trunk standing near the door R. Lights turned low. The door is cautiously opened, and a young man enters on tip toe, and promptly falls over the box in the darkness, with a suitable exclamation. He listens for a moment and then shuts the door with great care, and gropes about for a seat. Finding no other, he seats himself tailor wise on the box, pushing it nearer to the door, and, having turned up the light, examines his ball programme with obvious distaste. A minute later footsteps are heard outside, and the door opens and collides violently with the box. Looking round with the horrified air of a truant caught in the act, he sees a girl, also carrying a programme, in the doorway, and hurriedly springs to his feet.*)

She. Oh——! I do beg your pardon : I never dreamed of anyone else's being up here. Shall I——?

He. Oh, no ! Please don't !

She (coming forward). And did I hurt you ? I'm so sorry.

He. Not at all ! I enjoyed it. Where will you sit ? I'm afraid you won't find it very comfortable here, you know. Try this box ! No, wait a minute ! We'll put that old carpet bag on the top. I don't know how clean it is —(*rubs finger on it*). Ugh ! Disgusting ! You'd better have my handkerchief. (*He spreads it, and she sits down.*)

She. Thank you very much. I don't deserve all this really, for I'm being very wicked.

He. I'm sure you're not.

She. But I *am* ; I'm cutting a partner for these two dances !

He (with a quizzical look which she does not see). Cutting him for two dances ! You don't say so ! What a dreadful thing to do ! I'm awfully sorry for the poor fellow, whoever he is.

She. You needn't be. I'm sure he's a horrid worm. . . . I had to find a very good hiding-place, because my aunt will hunt high and low for me ; she's that kind of woman. The Horrid Worm is a protégé of hers, you know. I would have hidden in the garden if it hadn't been such a wet night. You don't think she'll ever penetrate to *this* place, do you ?

He. I'm sure I hope not. But what would happen if she did ?

She. Oh, I don't know! Of course she'd think I was sitting out the Worm's dances with you,—whereas I don't even know your name. If she asked me I shouldn't be able to tell her.

He. But what's in a name? Mine is sure to be Jones or Smith, and what *does* it matter *which* it is?

She. Well, which is it?

He. Whichever you like better.

She. I don't like either.

He. Well then, it isn't.

She. Isn't what?

He. Either, of course!

She. Well, as you say, what does it matter? If my aunt *does* come she'll be far too angry to care whether you're Brown, or Jones, or Robinson. But why are *you* up here? You're not cutting a partner, *of course*?

He. Why "of course?"

She. Oh! it would be such a horrid thing for a *man* to do, though it's not unpardonable in a woman. But do tell me why you *are* up here?

He. Well—er—fact is,—er—I've—er—got a bet on with a fellow—er—er—that—(*struck with a bright idea*) that our host shan't be able to find me for the Lancers. Awful bore, Lancers; I can't stand them at any price; and you know what a fussy old boy Gray is, he'll hunt up every Johnny he can get.

She. The *Lancers*? But the *Lancers*

don't come for ages! (*looks at programme.*) Why, not till after supper!

He. Oh!—er—No, of course not! (*Romancing boldly.*) But—didn't you know they'd changed them to No. 6—this next dance as ever is?

She (*springing up*). Oh, have they? Then I must go down at once; I'm engaged for the Lancers; and I must trust to luck that I don't meet the Worm. (*Examines her programme.*) Oh, dear! It is awkward when you cut people's dances!

He (*getting between her and the door*). Yes, it is indeed! (*Sententiously*) "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, When first we practise to deceive!" Sweet poem, that, isn't it? Are you fond of poetry?

She (*ignoring him*). Is that the band?

He. No—the *bard*—a difference of one letter only! But you haven't answered my question.

She. Because it was such a silly one. Was that the band? . . . Listen! (*Long pause.*) Well, what's the matter now?

He (*in a grotesque attitude of eager listening*). I'm still doing it, that's all.

She. Doing what?

He. Listening, of course; as you told me!

She. Oh, you *are* provoking! I'd almost rather you quoted 'poetry' than stand staring there, looking as if you'd seen a ghost.

He (*with alacrity*). More poetry? De-

lighted! (*Assumes attitude of professional reciter, standing in front of her.*) Now, what shall I give you? Ha! I have it. (*With professional manner*)—

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
All in a garden fair,
There came a great spider,
And sat down beside her,
To tie up her bonny brown hair!

She (unwillingly amused). How ridiculous, and how horrid! . . . Perhaps, if you have quite done, you'll kindly allow me to pass?

He (throwing out his chest and thumping it). Ah, but I haven't done! I'm now regularly in the vein for it. *Listen!* as you yourself remarked just now! (*impressively, as she sits down, with a gesture of impatience*)—

My man Friday
Kept the house tidy,
For such was his business to do so.
Ting te tang, Tang! Ting te tang, tang!
Oh! Poor Robinson Crusoe!"

(*Sits down beside her.*)

She. How absurd you are! *Do go away.*

He (in injured tones). You want me to go away? Really? Well, I'm sure I don't know why. (*Folding hands, and rolling up eyes*). I'm perfectly harmless; a child might play with me! So *why* you should wish to drive me away——

She (impatiently). Oh, how tiresome you

are! I don't wish to drive anyone anywhere: All I want is to go down to my partner, and dance the Lancers. (*She rises. He gets between her and the door.*) Please to let me pass! *Really, Sir!*

He. It's all for your own good. The music hasn't begun yet, and if you're such a very early bird you'll certainly catch the Worm—at least he'll catch you.

She. I don't care. I gave the Lancers to Captain Carr, so it's *his* dance now, not the Worm's.

He (shaking his head). Don't you flatter yourself! Worms are very tenacious of their rights, as you'd know if you were anything of a gardener.

She. There! I'm *sure* that's No. 6 beginning. Please move out of my way.

He (affecting astonishment after a moment's embarrassment). No. 6? Why! I never said they'd changed the Lancers to No. 6, did I?

She. You certainly did.

He. *Did I?* Oh, I say! I'm so sorry! What an *awful* ass I am! I didn't mean *six*, I meant *nine*, of course.

She. Rather a difference, isn't there?

He. None at all. It's exactly the same figure, only turned upside down! Now please stay! There's no earthly sense in your rushing into the arms of your aunt, and the Worm. (*She sits down.*) (*He moves round behind her.*) By the way, though, worms don't *have* arms, do they, poor things?

She (pettishly). I think you're very flippant, and it isn't one bit amusing for *me*, I can tell you! I'm sure I wish the wretch was at the bottom of the sea! He's *quite* spoilt my dance.

He (hurt). Oh, don't say that! Aren't you enjoying it *at all*?

She. Of course I'm not!

He (sitting down by her on the end of the box). Really? Aren't you enjoying yourself (*moving nearer*) *now*, just a little?

She (crushingly). Not in the least.

He. Well, nor am I!

She. Indeed? Then might I ask why you were so anxious to prolong the situation?

He. Merely out of pity, I assure you.

She. For whom? Yourself, I suppose.

He. Not at all.

She. For *me*, then? How extremely kind of you, Mr. — *Jones*! But pray keep your pity for someone who will appreciate it! *I don't.*

He. You shouldn't jump to conclusions. I never dreamed of pitying you, though now I come to think of it—— (*pause.*)

She. Yes? Oh, don't mind *me*! Pray go on!

He. No! On second thoughts I won't go on, or go anywhere. I'd rather stay where I am.

She. *I've* always been told that it's bad manners not to finish a sentence.

He. I believe I've forgotten what it was about by this time.

She. Well, all I can say is, I consider you the rudest man I've ever met. No one would be likely to forget *you*, I should think!

He. Ah! 'Thank you so much! I *fancied* I was making an impression!

She (*scornfully*). An *impression*! Oh! So you are, but it isn't an agreeable one.

He. Ah, I'm sorry for that!—— Perhaps even the "Horrid Worm" would shine by comparison. (*Meditatively*) If he shone, I suppose he'd be a *glow-worm*, wouldn't he?

She. How silly! I don't think you've made one sensible remark yet, Mr. Jones.

He. I thought we had agreed that my name was *not* Jones, Miss—er—*Brown*! But I've no objection to telling you what it is; shall I?

She (*indifferently*). Oh, please don't trouble!

He. I never do. But what troubles *me* is that I've got the most awful cramp! I can't stay like this. I really must get something decent to sit on, though where it's to come from goodness only known. (*He looks about and finally discovers a rocking horse wrapped up in dust sheets; he drags it out triumphantly.*) Hallo! Here we are; this will be splendid. But perhaps *you* would like it? I'm sure you're a horsewoman. Come, you *do* ride, don't you?

She. Yes, but not in evening-dress; I require a habit, so don't let me deprive you of your mount.

He (settling himself on horse). All right. Whoa! Ride a cock-horse, &c. Isn't he a sweet thing? He reminds me of buttercups and daisies, and treacle, and ear-boxings, and velvet suits, and all the rest of it. (*Striking an attitude.*) Ah! the days of my artless youth! It makes me feel quite maudlin* to think of them!

She (reflectively). How much nicer you must have been then than you are now!

He. Impossible! Quite impossible! But do let's get back to our quarrelling. Let me see! Where were we?

She (coldly). It takes two to make a quarrel, and it's a thing I never do.

He. Oh, come! We were both hard at it, in a friendly kind of way, just now. Oh! I remember! I was trying to tell you—only you *would* interrupt—who it was that I pitied.

She. Well, who was it?

He. The Worm.

[*N.B. (*If no horse is available, he hunts about vainly, and finally says*) No, there is nothing whatever. Well, then, I must sit on the floor. I used to, years ago, in the days of my artless youth. Oh! it makes me feel quite maudlin, &c.]

She. Pitied the Worm ?

He. Certainly, because I can see how you'll tread on him when you get the chance—tread him flat ! I wonder if I know the poor beggar. Is he a very poisonous sort ?

She. Oh, I don't know anything about him, except that he's a pet of Aunt Eliza's, and I always *hate* her pets.

He. I don't much like the idea of a pet worm !

She. The last three she introduced to me were *awful*, and yet she thought them quite delightful. This new one she's only seen once, I believe ; he's a friend's friend, and she hardly knows him really, but she *says* he's a perfect paragon. So, from past experience of her paragons, *I* should say he's probably scarcely *human* !

He. Well, that's almost what one would expect of a worm, isn't it ? But what's the fellow like to look at ?

She. I don't know ; I've never set eyes on him.

He. *Never set eyes on him ?* Then how the dickens did he manage to book up dances ?

She (*looking up from programme which she has been studying*). Oh, she did that ; Aunt Eliza, I mean. You see, he missed his train, (*He grins*)—and had to come down by the eight o'clock one, so he couldn't get here till the dance had begun, and my aunt very officiously volunteered to secure him a supper partner. What are you grinning at ?

He (laughing). Your aunt, of course! I'm very sorry, but I can't help it.

She. She put him down on my programme for Nos. 5 and 6, and the supper, and I was *furious*. So I thought if *I* cut these two dances, *he'd* cut the supper, very naturally, and it would be a good snub for Aunt Eliza.

He. But, then, who will take the poor Worm in to supper? Even reptiles must be fed, you know!

She. Oh, there are plenty of people! He's probably odious in every way, but he's very rich, I believe, and owns a large property, so there'll be no lack of snobs to squirm before him.

He. H'm! I always thought worms did the squirming themselves; the ones in *my* garden do, certainly. Well, you think he won't turn up for supper with you, anyhow?

She. Of course he won't—unless he's a *hopeless* worm—after my cutting these others!

He. Ah! Yes,—of course! It is a long worm that knows no turning, isn't it? Then what do you say to making over the supper dances to *me*? I can—arrange it.

She. Oh, can you really? That would be delightful.

He. By the way, what's the man's name? You've never told me that.

She. Oh, I don't think I *ought* to, after running him down so; and you must remember I don't know anything about him *really*;

I only know that all Aunt Eliza's favourites have been detestable, up to now. Of course he *may* be all that she says, and more; perfectly charming, perhaps, and not a Horrid Worm at all!

He (smiling to himself). I wonder! But please tell me his name——

She. Oh, but I'm *sure* I oughtn't.—Please!

He. Well, let me see it instead; then you won't have *told* me, will you? Give me your programme, and I'll write *my* name over his dances. (*Takes it from her.*) Ah! *Milbanke!*—Thank you! (*He hands back the programme and watches her.*)

She (puzzled). But you *haven't* put your name down!

He. I found it there already.

She. But that isn't *your* name? Why! You don't mean . . . ? You're not . . . you're not . . . ?

He (quickly). The Worm! Certainly (*with a low bow*). The "Horrid Worm," at your service!

She (horrified). Oh, but how awful! What can I say? You'll never forgive me; of course you never will. Oh, it's too dreadful!

He. I don't think so. You didn't know, and I didn't either, until you said that about the train just now.

She. Oh! but it is; it's awful!

He. Not at all! besides, I have a confession to make. *I was hiding from you.*

She (amazed). Were you?

He. I was, indeed. I thought *you* were probably a "worm."

She. You are very rude.

He. Well, but we're being rude, aren't we? . . . You see, I found myself ready booked to you by my hostess, and—like you—knowing her tastes——

She. You expected the worst . . . and ran away! Then (*with a sigh of relief*) you've behaved no better than I! And, as you *are* the "Worm," I haven't cut your dances, have I?

He. Ah! but you *meant* to, you know! And I'm not only a worm, but, according to you, a *hopeless* one,—for I *do* want your supper dances all the same!

(CURTAIN.)

FICKLE JULIET.

Characters :

Mrs. Castle, an attractive widow lady.

Juliet Kerr, her niece.

Sir John Tyrrwood, a country squire of middle age.

Clifford Broughton, only son of a wealthy squire.

Scene : A drawing-room, or a garden.

Time : Present day.

Enter Juliet and Clifford simultaneously from different directions. They catch sight of each other and both step back a pace.

Both. Oh !

Juliet. Please go away, Clifford ! I came here to be by myself.

Clifford. Did you ? Well, so did I !

(Both advance.)

Juliet. Then you may as well go back where you came from, for you can't be by yourself while *I'm* here.

Clifford. Well, perhaps there's something in that. *(He looks about him, or out of the window, with a nonchalant air. Pause).*

Juliet. Then why do you stay ? . . .
Possibly you are expecting *me* to go.?

Clifford (turning round). Wait a bit ! Which of us was here first ?

Juliet. Neither. We arrived at precisely the same moment. But it is usually understood that the man gives way to the woman !

Clifford. And he usually does. More especially this man, and particularly to this woman ! But, first, do let's sit down, and consider the situation.

Juliet. Certainly not (*pause*). Clifford, I'm waiting.

Clifford. My dear Juliet, what for ?

Juliet. For you to go and be by yourself, as you said you wished.

Clifford. Oh ! of course ! Thank you very much. But, do you know, I no longer wish it.

Juliet. Well, I do . . . (*Coldly*) I presume you have not forgotten that our engagement is broken off.

Clifford. No : I haven't forgotten that,—nor that you couldn't produce one blessed reason for it !

Juliet. Except, what is so stupidly called the woman's reason. But since I *am* a woman that reason should be good enough !

Clifford. It does not count at all. So let me ask you once again, what I have ever done to offend you ?

Juliet (petulantly). Nothing—nothing ! That's just it. You never *do* do anything, never—I wish you did ! Oh ! it is all so dull, and I am out of patience !

Clifford. You're not ; you're only out o temper, and you will be very sorry presently, while, as for your being tired of me, I don't believe it, Juliet, I simply don't believe it.

Juliet. There you are ! So sure of yourself, and so sure of me too, which is far worse ! But now it's all at an end. Why, it isn't five minutes since the last time I told you that, in the library !

Clifford. Really only five minutes ? It seems more like five years to me, and five long, dull ones, too !

Juliet. Ah ! You know I *did* wonder why you ever wanted to be alone ! It is so unlike you.

Clifford (gravely). I believe I wanted to be alone, to think about *you*.

Juliet. Oh, Clifford ! Don't ! You always manage to put me in the wrong, and to make me feel horrid. I'm not good enough for you, and never was ! But, for all that, why shouldn't I prefer somebody else ?

Clifford. Why not indeed ? But it most mercifully happens that you *don't* .

Juliet. Well, you oughtn't to make too certain of that ! Besides, why shouldn't I be a spinster if I like, instead of being bothered with anyone ? It would be far pleasanter to be my own mistress, and have no-one to call me to order.

Clifford (smiling). Very well, then. You

shall remain a spinster and I will remain a bachelor. A delightful idea!

Juliet (quickly). You would like that? Then we shall *both* be pleased! (*Pause, during which they stand looking at each other, then Juliet turns away*). But pray don't trouble to remain a bachelor on *my* account!

Clifford. Well, it might not be for very long. And of course as soon as ever we were tired of it we could be married.

Juliet. Oh! And whom shall *you* marry, if I may ask?

Clifford. You, of course, my dear girl, who else?

Juliet (impatiently). Ah, I might have known you were only fooling. Of course I meant I'd *really* be a spinster, an ordinary middle-aged one, with grey hair, and all that sort of thing.

Clifford. But you could never be ordinary, and it'll take so long for you to be middle-aged. And your hair doesn't turn grey to order; you would have to either bleach it, which would be dreadful, or manage to have some horrid shock, which would be worse! No, we'd better drop the spinster idea. But I'm quite willing to play at—what shall I say?—being disengaged to you for a little! So now tell me who is to be my supplanter?

Juliet. Play at it, indeed! *I'm* not playing! And I daresay there will be plenty to choose from, without having to go very far afield!

Clifford. What? None in this neighbourhood, surely! There are only a few wretched mushrooms, are there? In fact, I can't think of anyone except that old idiot Sir John Tyrwood!

Juliet. He isn't old!

Clifford. Not old! *Juliet!* You were never thinking of *that* man? He's old enough to be your father.

Juliet. Well, he needn't be so very old to be that, and most certainly he's not an idiot. He's a delightful man, and very kind, and good, and gentle, and upright, and honourable!

Clifford (mockingly). Dear me! *All* the virtues? Then I'm afraid you would find him even more boring than you do me, since my few little good points are so exasperating to you. Let me see, it is chiefly my in-offensiveness that you find so offensive, isn't it? So how could you ever endure a paragon like Sir John?

Juliet (ignoring this). And he's been everywhere, and seen everything, and came over with William the Conqueror, so *he's* not a mushroom!

Clifford (laughing). A *mushroom*? My dear girl, he's a *curiosity*! I knew he was old, but I didn't know he was so old as that! Why, he's a precious and most valuable antique, and you must certainly add him to your collection! I should put him into a

glass case: (*Meaningly*) then he'd be out of harm's way, and a good thing too.

Juliet (*whose fit of temper is abating*). How silly you are, Clifford! You know quite well that I only meant his family is an old one. I do believe you're running him down only because you're *jealous*!

Clifford. *Jealous*! Jealous of an old ass like him? I think there's no need for that: he'd never have *dared* to aspire to you, in any case.

Juliet. Not while he thinks I'm engaged to you, of course. But if he knew it was all over between us you can't tell what he might do.

Clifford (*really angry now*). You should refuse him,—I would *insist* on it.

Juliet (*laughs, walks away, and speaks over her shoulder*). And what should I care? I'll tell you what, if Sir John *does* ask me to marry him, I shall do it, just because you said that, so it will be all your own fault. (*She turns to face him.*)

Clifford (*controlling his temper with an effort*). Very well, Juliet. I'll—say good-bye now. You'll shake hands, won't you?

Juliet (*visibly melting a little*). Yes, oh yes! (*gives him her hand, which he keeps in his; she smiles, but Clifford looks very grave*) and if—if—it turns out badly, you must blame yourself! You shouldn't have been so masterful, Clifford:

Clifford. No, I oughtn't to have spoken like that. Will you forgive me?

Juliet (melting still more). Yes, I'll forgive you, of course. Oh, don't look like that! Goodbye!

Clifford. And if—by any chance—Sir John *doesn't* ask you?

Juliet. Well, if he *doesn't* ask me, then I suppose—oh! there he is! Come away, Clifford, *quick*, before he sees us.

(*They disappear*).

Enter Mrs. Castle and Sir John Tyrrwood.

Sir John (panting). There! I think—we have found a quiet spot at last for our conversation, Mrs. Castle—I have something very important to say, but I've kept putting off, and putting off, you know, for a *long* time past.

Mrs. Castle (archly). Putting off the evil day, Sir John? It's a very bad habit!

Sir John (quickly). The evil day! Then it is to be an evil day! Bless my soul! the very thing I was afraid of, and the very reason I *did* keep putting off. An evil day, then, bless my soul!

Mrs. Castle (demurely). You are very mysterious! I really have no idea what you're talking about.

Sir John. No idea what I'm talking about? Upon my word, that beats all. I thought a woman always knew what one was driving at. Well, well! never mind that. I'll try and explain: Now, look here! You've got a very charming niece.

Mrs. Castle (much taken aback). Niece?

Niece? Oh yes! to be sure, Sir John. Juliet certainly is quite a charming girl.

Sir John. Charming! Just so; more than charming; most attractive. Couldn't be two opinions, could there?

Mrs. Castle. Oh, well, I don't know: tastes differ so much, don't they, all the world over!

Sir John. I should like to see the man who would differ from me about Miss Juliet's looks! . . . Why in the old days I should have called him out, you know—called him out! Quite a beauty she is, really, you know, hair and complexion and all that,—isn't she?

Mrs. Castle (dully). Oh, yes.

Sir John (smiling). And, that being so, you can hardly expect to keep her with you much longer—what?

Mrs. Castle (exasperated). But I don't expect to, Sir John—of course not! You have evidently—very evidently—forgotten that my niece is engaged to Clifford Broughton.

Sir John. Ah, yes, exactly! I was coming to that in a moment. Been rather a long engagement, hasn't it? Great mistake, that. Excellent young fellow, Broughton; fine specimen and all that; I've nothing to say against him, nothing. . . . Very good and steady. But Miss Juliet hasn't fixed the wedding day yet—what?

Mrs. Castle (with a very stately manner).

She may have done so, but she has not taken me into her confidence.

Sir John. Ah! Then of course she hasn't, exactly! So, I shall certainly put my spoke in the wheel.

Mrs. Castle. *Sir John!* I would never have believed it of you! Nor have I ever been more astonished, or more pained!

Sir John (much startled). Bless me! what on earth's the matter? What are you astonished at? You're talking nonsense, my dear lady; you've gone off your head, I'm afraid!

Mrs. Castle (grimly). I *hope* so! In which case I may have misunderstood your meaning. But, if I *am* in my sober senses, you are deliberately planning to undermine the happiness of two innocent young people!

Sir John. *Undermine their happiness?* Are you talking of Miss Juliet and Broughton? I undermine their happiness? In what way, if you please?

Mrs. Castle. By coming between them, of course.

Sir John. *Coming between them?* I? You are certainly raving; there's no doubt of that.

Mrs. Castle. Oh! Then I'm sure—oh! please don't be so angry! (*feels for her handkerchief*). I'm sure I beg your pardon very humbly, if you didn't mean that, but I don't know what you *do* mean, in the least!

Sir John (anxiously). My dear lady, for goodness' sake, don't begin to cry! I never know what to do when a woman cries; feel so uncommon awkward, you know; and there's nothing to cry about. My meaning was plain enough, I should have thought. I want to hurry up those young people to marry, and take themselves off, so as to leave the field clear for you and me.

Mrs. Castle (bewildered by the sudden reaction). You and me? You and me?

Sir John (taking her hand). Yes, to be sure,—why not? I've climbed to the top of the hill, Jessie, and I'll soon be going down, and if you were there to give me a hand now and then, my dear, and a smile sometimes,—well, it wouldn't seem so steep! Tell me, now! Will you be there, Jessie?

Mrs. Castle. Yes, oh, yes! . . . I'll be there! . . . But I thought from what you said just now it was *Juliet* you were thinking of—to marry, I mean!

Sir John (electrified). *Juliet?* I marry *Juliet*, . . . a chit like that? Bless my soul! I'd never have given a thought to that child, if she'd been unappropriated ten times over! *I marry Juliet?* No, my dear, I'd know better than that, and so would she, depend upon it!

Mrs. Castle. Oh, I don't know; one never can tell. . . . Ah, John! but I'm glad it *isn't* Juliet you care for! She has Clifford,

who is so faithful, and so patient with her caprices, and I have no one, and often feel lonely.

Sir John (tenderly) Lonely? Poor Jessie! poor little woman! But you shall never be lonely any more; I'll take care of you, don't be afraid! (*He moves closer to her.*)

Mrs. Castle (contentedly). No, I'm not afraid . . . and I'll try to be a very good wife!

Sir John (seriously). I know you'll be that; the best of wives. (*He lifts her hand, kisses it, and keeps it in his.*) . . . But you'll let it be soon, Jessie, very soon, won't you? The shadows are creeping up, you know, and I want to make the most of my bit of sunshine. . . I'm an old fellow, my dear, and you mustn't keep me waiting!

Mrs. Castle (passionately). You're not old, John! You will never be old, to me!

Sir John (smiling very kindly, and patting her hand). Not old, eh? not old? My dear! my dear! . . . Well, too old to take any risks, at all events. (*Enter Juliet and Clifford; they start back on seeing the others, and are uncertain whether to escape or declare themselves.*) Come, what do you say to a double wedding? don't you think that's a very good idea? (*Clifford looks at Juliet in astonishment.*) Fix a date, Jessie, an early date, mind, and let Juliet and Clifford be married on the same day that we are. Why not?

Mrs. Castle. I don't see any objection. It shall be just as you like, John, that is, if I can persuade Juliet. Oh, I hear somebody coming.

Sir John (promptly). Then we're off. Come, my dear! *(They go out, and the other two advance.)*

Juliet (in a tone of elaborate carelessness). Well, I always told you Aunt Jessie was a fascinating woman, didn't I? Now, perhaps, you will believe it!

Clifford. All women are alike to me, except one; you know that.

Juliet. Ah, what nonsense! *(nervously re-arranges a rose she is wearing.)*

Clifford (softly). May I have that, Juliet?

Juliet. This? But it's all faded! Let me go and get you another.

Clifford. No, I want that one, please.

Juliet. Oh, very well! *(She unpins it hurriedly, and holds it out to him.)*

Clifford. Won't you put it in?

Juliet (as she fastens the rose in his coat). There you are, then, there's your faded old rose! *(She speaks lightly but turns away very quickly to hide her face from him.)*

Clifford. Thank you. I have wanted that rose all day.

Juliet. Your wants are easily satisfied.

Clifford (very gravely). It seems not, sometimes.

Juliet. Anyhow, you always want things that . . . aren't worth having!

Clifford. Well, I think I am the best judge of that. The value of anything—to all of us,—is the value we ourselves put upon it.

Juliet (slowly). Yes, I suppose so (*demurely looking up at Clifford*). Of course Sir John wouldn't care for my faded rose, but he would for one of Aunt Jessie's!

Clifford. No doubt; everyone to his taste!
. . . . What a sly old dog he is!
. . . . Just think; that's what he must have been after all the time, and you didn't know it!

Juliet (smiling). But of course I did.

Clifford. What? You *knew*? (*Pause.*)
Juliet, come here!

Juliet (dancing away). Certainly not I'm going to congratulate Sir John!

(*Exit, quickly followed by Clifford.*)

CURTAIN.

THE FORTESCUES' : : : : : DINNER PARTY.

Characters :

Dennis Ellgood.

Joan Ellgood.

Time : The present.

Scene : Mrs. Ellgood's sitting-room.

SCENE I.

5.30 p.m.

Dennis discovered reading, in an armchair.

Enter Joan, in her outdoor things.

Joan. Well, Dennis, here I am at last (*puts down card-case and gloves, etc.*). All the nice people were out, and all the dull ones were at home.

Dennis. M—m—m.

Joan. Well, you don't seem particularly pleased to see me!

Dennis (impatiently). Of course I am! But can't you see I'm reading?

Joan. Oh, I see all right! I only thought you might have left off!

(*Sighs*). Dennis! (*No answer*).

Oh dear! how I should *hate* to get absorbed in a book like that Dennis!

Dennis (crossly). What is it?

Joan. Oh, nothing! Only it's very dull for me when you're so taken up with that silly book!

Dennis. Well—get a book yourself!

Joan. No thank you! *I* don't want to read! (*Sighs*) Did anyone call this afternoon? (*No reply*).

Did anyone call this afternoon?

Dennis. Don't know (*settles himself resolutely in his chair, and holds up book ostentatiously*).

Joan. And did the box come from the Stores?

Dennis. Don't know.

Joan. Oh, and *did* Walpole send for the cabinet to be mended?

Dennis. Don't know.

Joan. Oh, *dear*! Is there anything you *do* know?

Dennis. Yes; I know I can't make any sense of what I'm reading when you're chattering like a magpie all the time!

Joan (injured). I wasn't chattering; I was only asking questions.

Dennis. Well, for goodness' sake, don't ask any more.

Joan. I don't know that I've any more to ask. Oh! *who's* been making hay in my basket? Was it you, Dennis? Was it you, Dennis?

Dennis. I didn't make hay; I only looked for your pen-knife. Couldn't find mine.

Joan. I daresay you never half looked for yours ; now did you ?

Dennis. More or less,—yes.

Joan. Well, I wish you *wouldn't* rummage in my basket. And very likely the knife's in your pocket the whole time, as it was once before. (*Goes to him, and feels in his coat pockets.*)

Dennis (wrathfully). Now, look here, Joan ; this is the *last* straw ! How *am* I to read with you fussing round me like a mosquito ?

Joan (moving away). How horrid you are ! You've called me a magpie and a mosquito !

Dennis. Very well, my dear, if you like to say so Now *do* go and sit down, and let us have a little peace and quiet, if it's only for five minutes (*settles himself anew*).

Joan (pathetically, as she retires to her chair again). It's very odd, but whenever I feel *particularly* inclined to talk, you always want to be quiet ! (*She tidies her workbasket in silence for a few seconds, with a martyred expression*). Oh, Dennis !

Dennis. What on earth is it now ?

Joan. I only wanted to ask you if you remember it's the Fortescues' dinner party to-night ?

Dennis (straightening himself). Well, considering you talked about it the whole of breakfast *and* the whole of lunch, I *ought* to remember.

Joan. Well, but it's very important. The Fortescues have a lot in their power. They could do a good deal for you if they felt inclined. So for goodness' sake do smarten yourself up this evening, and try to make yourself agreeable, and leave a good impression.

(Dennis grunts impatiently. Joan rises and pokes the fire with righteous energy.)

Dennis. What are you doing, Joan? Why can't you poke the fire without all that intolerable clatter?

Joan. I'm very sorry, Dennis. But—oh! before you get absorbed again,—*do* settle how we're going to-night? Shall we have a taxi or a hansom?

Dennis. I don't care a hang; have whichever you like!

Joan. Oh, well! I love a taxi.

Dennis. All right, then; *have* a taxi!

Joan. Ye—es. . . . Only, then, it's such an awful night, and I couldn't stand a taxi with the windows shut. So perhaps we'd better have a hansom.

Dennis. Very well, then, *have* a hansom!

Joan. Ye—es! . . . all right! . . . But then . . . one's hair gets so frightfully untidy in a hansom. . . . Oh! I think we'd better have a taxi after all! I'll just go and tell Mary. *(Exit.)*

Dennis (settling himself comfortably). Well, now there'll be a little peace!

Joan (returning, and approaching Dennis on

tiptoe). Dennis, darling!—I won't interrupt you for two seconds—so *don't* be cross, will you? There's only one more thing I want to ask! . . . what frock shall I wear to-night?

Dennis. Oh, lor! My dear Joan, what *does* it matter?

Joan. Oh, of *course* it does! Why, I want to make a good impression too! The black one's newer, but then I do look so much nicer in the pink one!

Dennis. Little silly! Why don't you toss up?

Joan. Oh, Dennis, what a good idea! So I will! (*She searches her pocket, hunts in her work-basket, and examines the cups on the mantelpiece!*) No; bother! . . . Dennis!

Dennis. Oh! *what do you want?*

Joan. I only want some money.

Dennis (*angrily*). Only want some money? What on earth have you done with the cheque I gave you on Monday?

Joan. Oh! I only mean some money to toss up with; a penny or something.

Dennis. (*feeling in all his pockets*). Then why couldn't you say so? . . . Here you are. (*Gives her a penny.*)

Joan. Now, then; pink frock, heads, and black one, tails. No; the other way round—because somehow I nearly always throw tails, and I *do* so want to wear the pink one. (*She tosses*). Oh, it's heads after all! How *awfully*

disappointing ! And I'd set my heart on wearing pink ! (*Brightening up*). But then, things ought to go by contraries, oughtn't they ? So I *shall* wear the pink one all the same ! I'll go and put it out now. (*Exit.*)

Dennis. My stars ! Who wouldn't be a woman ?

CURTAIN.

SCENE II.

(As before).

Dennis (*dressed for dinner, and in his great-coat, shouting through his wife's bedroom door*). Joan ! Are you ready ? Come along ! You said you were ready 20 minutes ago !

Joan (*unseen*). Well, so I was, very nearly.

But I can't *find* anything ! Don't *fuss* so, Dennis !

Dennis. Fuss, indeed ! Anyone would fuss. Do you know the taxi is *here* ?

Joan. Well, I can't help it ! I can't go without shoes ! And these shoes—oh, bother ! —they're all *right*——

Dennis. Well, then, put them on, can't you ? And come along, do !

Joan. But, I tell you, they're all *right*——

Dennis. Well ; I *say*, put them on !

Joan. But I *can't*;—they're all wrong!

Dennis: I thought you said they were all right!

Joan. Well, so they are, stupid! I was going to say they're all for the right *foot*. That's what I meant.

Dennis. Then why on earth can't you say what you mean?

Joan. Well; you never would let me finish! Ah, here's a left one! . . . Now I'm ready!

Dennis (rapping on door). Joan! I refuse to wait another moment. Come *instantly*!

Joan. Yes! Yes! all right! But *now* I can't find my *gloves* anywhere.

Dennis. Then come *without* them! You *must* come, ready or unready! Come at once!

Joan. Well,—they're gone! I shall have to wear old ones—that's all! . . . Oh! these have been cleaned! Do you think they'll smell of benzine, Dennis?

Dennis. I don't *know*, or *care*! Will you come? Do you realise that the cab's waiting, and the fare's mounting up all this time?

Joan. Well,—but I can't go without my hairnet! and I've dropped it somewhere. What a nuisance! And the wretched thing doesn't show, because of the pattern of the carpet!

Dennis. Well,—all I can say is,—I'm going to telephone *at once*, to say you're ill, and we can't come! I won't be brought to

disgrace by your unpunctual habits! I'm going to telephone *now*, *do you hear?*

Joan. Oh, don't be so silly, Dennis! . . . Ah! there it is! Now, then! . . . now I *am ready!* There! . . . and I *do* think I really look rather nice!

Dennis. Then it's more than you deserve! *Are you coming?*

Joan. If I can find my fan!—(Ah! there it is!) (*Emerging*). Yes,—here I am!—quite ready! Don't be cross, Dennis;—and please help me on with this!

Dennis (*putting on her cloak, with many tugs and ejaculations*). Pest take the thing!

Joan. Why—you've put it on inside out!

Dennis (*re-arranging it*). *Bother!!!*

Joan. And I'm not going on a night like this without the rug. Do go down, and tell Mary to get it out.

Dennis. Hang the rug! You're enough to drive any man crazy! (*Exit furiously.*)

Joan (*puts the room straight,—then stands by the fire, idly examining the cards, etc., on the mantelpiece. Suddenly she starts, and looks closer at one of them*). Oh! . . . well!!!!!! . . . (*Laughs to herself*).

Dennis (*returning*). Come along, will you? The taxi's been waiting for ages, and I shall have to pay goodness knows how much before we even start. *It's a perfect nuisance!*

Joan (*smiling*). Indeed it is! Oh, Dennis, what *will* you say? . . .

Dennis (seeing her take off her cloak). What on earth . . . ?

Joan. Why!—I've just looked at the Fortescues' invitation, and the dinner-party isn't till next week!! It isn't to-night at all! (She holds out the card to Dennis, who seizes it, examines it, and tears it to pieces).

As the Curtain descends Joan is speechless with laughter, and Dennis inarticulate with fury.

CURTAIN.

“JOHN ARBERY’S DREAM.”

"JOHN ARBERY'S DREAM."

A RUSTIC IDYLL.

Characters :

Prologue and Epilogue :

John Arbery, a Crimean veteran.

Thomas Field, a labourer.

The Dream :

Mrs. Arbery.

John, her son.

Mrs. Smith.

Dora, Meg, and Rose, her daughters.

Susan, the farm lass.

Robert, Bill, and Joe, village boys.

Time : Prologue and Epilogue : c. 1910.

The Dream : c. 1855.

Place : The orchard in Smith's (later Orchard) Farm.

PROLOGUE.

(Cuckoo heard in distance.)

Old John Arbery is seen approaching, limping painfully along with the aid of a stick, and pausing frequently for breath. Sound of faint whistling is heard.)

John. This be it, sure enough. *(Looking back.)* Ay! That were a bit of a pull up, that were: it's set my old 'eart a-beatin' too fast. . . . *(Puts his hand to his heart.)*

But it were worth it, so it were: if it had killed me it would a'been,—just—to see—the old place once more—ah! (*He groans, and props himself against a tree. Whistling becomes louder, and Thomas Field appears, with a hoe over his shoulder, and in his hand a bundle tied up in a red cotton handkerchief: he comes quite close to the old man before he catches sight of him.*)

Thomas. 'Ullo! What's the matter with you? Be you took bad, Father?

John (*in a trembling voice*). No, no! I bain't took bad. But I've a-comed—a long way—, an' I be that tired. I'm an old man an' I bain't fit for a long tramp; but I'd such a fancy to see the old place again. I be agoin' to the Union, lad. Ay! I've come—to that—at last. But I wanted a sight o' the old place first. (*Draws himself up, and looks round*). It ain't changed, not in all these years! Why, I'd used to be here at Smith's Farm, playin' in this very orchard, time I were a boy, 60 years ago an' more!

Thomas. Smith's Farm? This ain't Smith's Farm. This is Orchard Farm, this is; Mr. Francis's place. P'raps, though, it may a' been Smith's Farm, time o' the ark: I've no call to say it warn't. We ain't been in these parts not so very long. (*He throws down his hoe, and begins to untie his bundle.*) Well, I'm going to have a bit o' dinner, I am. Set down, now, an' have a bite with me.

(*The old man sits down heavily.*) Best set on the bench, mister; the ground's powerful damp. (. . .) That's right. This is good stuff, this is: and this 'er's cold tea; that's good stuff too. There yer are.

John. 'Thankee, lad, thankee! I'll not eat nothing, but a drop o' that tea I'd be thankful for. It'll may be refresh me a bit, I be that tired.—Ay! Many's the time we've ate an' drank down in this orchard in the old days—many's the time! Dancin' we'd have, I mind, too, an' a couple o' boys to fiddle for us. Joe and Bill their names was, and they'd used to play the music for all the junketin's and that round here. Ay! the fiddles was grand, they was!

Thomas (with contempt). Fiddles! Well, I don't think much o' *fiddles*; a pore squeaky kind of a noise, I call *them*. Mr. Francis, now (*jerking thumb over shoulder*) he always 'as a gramyphone down in the barn for the dancin', and that's somethin' *like* music. It 'ud take a rare lot of fiddlin' to come up to a gramyphone,—that it would! . . . 'Oo lived 'ere when you was a boy?

John. Why, Mrs. Smith lived here, an' owned the place; ain't your never heard talk o' *her*? An' me an' my old mother, we lived in the little white house yonder, but we spent most of our time 'ere, with Mrs. Smith an' her girls. She'd got a precious sharp tongue, that woman, an' she'd be for ever a-argufyin'

with my mother, that she would. Set an' set they would by the hour together,—all the while a-argufying, and never one of 'em comin' no nearer to persuadin' of the other. Times it would be about one thing: times it would be about another. Most times it would be about which was best, sons or daughters. Ay! they was never tired o' *that*. My mother never had but the one child, an' Mrs. Smith, hers was all girls; bonny lasses they was, too. Ay! She'd a sharp tongue, but she were a right good woman, an' she were the mother o' my Dora (*lapses into silence*).

Thomas Dora!

John. Ay! my little Dora, an' that's enough for me now, though I didn't set much store by it then, worse luck!— I were a thoughtless lad, an' I never seemed to care much for none of them till I'd lost them, and it were too late. (*Leaning forward.*) I went for a soldier, young man, against the wishes of them all, an' I never saw them no more! never no more! (*Brokenly.*)

Thomas. Ah! Wouldn't I like a be a soldier! I'd take the King's shilling to-morrow, and thankful, if it wasn't for leaving my old mother.

John. Ay, lad, you're a better man nor me; I wish I'd felt the same.— I mind the day now I went to the wars; everything they said an' done that day is stamped on my mind, as clear as clear. Called away sudden,

I was, sooner than we'd thought for, in the middle of a haymakin' as it might be now, in this very orchard. Fifty-five years ago to-day—this very day!— That set up an' excited I were, an' felt that grand, I thought no more o' the partings than that there blade o' grass . . . Ay,—but it broke my mother's heart, an' little Dora's too. (*He falls into a muse: sound of cuckoo again, and of Church bells.*)

Thomas (prosaically). 'Ow that old bird do keep on 'ollerin' to be sure! I often wonder it don't get tired o' making the same old racket all the while.

John (rousing himself). No, no, boy! I'm fond o' the cuckoo; it do call to mind old times so. . . . Ay, and hark to them bells! 'Ark at 'em! Ay! When I were a young fellow like you, I never thought but what them bells would ring for my weddin' one day; but they never did, lad, never.—No, my little Dora she died afore I'd been long out in the wars. why, it's more nor fifty year since they laid 'er up in the churchyard yonder. Ay! (*Rising*). To think on it! My little Dora laid away in the churchyard more nor fifty year ago! (*moves slowly away*).

Thomas (stupidly). Ah! Fifty year! It do seem a fairish bit o' time, don't it?

John. Fifty year!—an' here's her old John a-cumberin' o' the earth still, an' agoing to the Union, an' all: old John Arbery goin'

to the Union ! 'There's never been an Arbery done *that* afore.

Thomas (following him and speaking briskly). Now look 'ere, Mister, we don't want to hear no more talk o' the Union, for you ain't fit to walk another step, not like you be now. You just stop where you are, and have a bit of a rest, and when I gets back from my 'arrand you shall come along o' me, and me and my old mother, we'll fix you up as well as we can, for as long as you care to stop. We're plain folk, but we've got a nice little 'ome, and anyways we're a sight better nor going to the Union !

John. God bless you, young man, God bless you ! You're a good lad, you are.—Ay ! I'll come along o' you, just for a bit, an' thank you kindly, for I do think I couldn't go no further to-day. I be that tired ! . . . I think if I was to lay down a bit I'd may be drop off to sleep, an' p'raps, bein' in the old place an' all, I'd dream a while of the old days I was tellin' you of.—I'd like fine to dream on it. (*Thomas arranges some hay as a pillow for the old man, with rough kindness, then slowly collects the cup, handkerchief, etc., and ties up his bundle again.*)

John (drowsily.) Ay ! to dream o' my mother, bless her !—and the dancin'—and haymakin', and the fiddlin'—and Mrs. Smith and the girls. . . . Ay ! and of my little Dora. An' 'ow I went to the wars,—fifty

five years ago to-day ! (*His voice dies away and his face drops down on his arms.*)

Thomas (picks up his bundle, gets up slowly, and shoulders his hoe once more, then walks away a few steps : but comes back and stoops over John.) Why, bless me ! If the old chap ain't off already, as sound as a babby ! Pore old man ! he must have been just about wore out.—Well, mother'll give 'im a welcome ; an' she'd never have forgiven me, not if I'd passed 'im by. (*He stands still for a few seconds, looking down at the old man, then trudges off slowly, whistling, and disappears round a corner. Church bells and cuckoo are heard again, followed by soft music, and after two or three minutes John's dream begins.*

THE DREAM.

(*Enter Rose and Meg, running.*)

Rose. There, Meg, I *did* get here first !

Meg. No, you didn't. Besides, you had a start. Make haste, boys, or we'll never get done. Here comes Dora : let's hide her rake !

Rose. She won't care : she's so taken up with John. Don't they look silly ? Ah, I wish *I* was a man, and going out to the wars, don't you ?

Meg. No, of course I don't. I wouldn't

want to have my head cut off, or *something* dreadful happen. Dora, come along, and do your share! *Dora!*

Dora. What? Oh, yes! I'm coming. Come and help me, Johnny, won't you? Let's go over there! Where's my rake? Meg! what have you done with my rake? Oh, Johnny, *promise* me you won't get killed!

Johnny (tossing hay). Don't be stupid, Dora! I dare say I shall. There'll be better men than me killed, too, you may be sure of that. It don't make much odds, either, as I can see.

Dora. Oh, John, how *can* you talk so? and me so miserable already!

Johnny. Well, I'd just as soon die, come to that, as stop on in this dead-alive place, year in and year out. I want to see a bit o' life, *I* do.

Dora (smiling through tears.) Well, if you was to die, it's not much of life you'd see, is it, John? Oh, I wish you wouldn't go: I wish anything might happen so you *couldn't*.

John. And that's a nice thing to say to a fellow what's set his 'eart on goin' out. You're selfish, Dora, real selfish; all women are. They don't see a man ought to do what's best for *'imself*.—Oh, 'ere's your rake! come on and do a bit of work! that'll make you feel a lot better, that will— An' don't you fret: I'll come back to plague you all yet!

(*Enter Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Arbery,*

followed by Susan carrying a basket of peas.)

Mrs. S. (*briskly*). Put 'em down, Susan, and get to the hay, quick, lass! (*sits and shells peas vigorously*). Now, then, what are you all doing? Idling, some of you, I'll be bound! Rose, you'd ought to be ashamed of yourself, romping like that along o' the boys. Go back to your place and mind your work! Dora, you'll not be finished while Christmas without you put more 'eart into the job. Deary me! what worriments girls are, to be sure!

Mrs. A. (*who is seated and knitting*). Yes, that they are: I'm real glad I never 'ad any. There's my John, now, that's a good lad, and something for any mother to be proud of;—worth a dozen girls any day.

Mrs. S. (*sharply*). An' what may you mean by that, Mary Jane? Anyone as 'as a word to say against *my* girls——

Mrs. A. No, no, Eliza! they're just flibberty-gibbets, that's all, same as all girls are: no worse than most, I daresay.

Mrs. S. *No worse than most!* A pretty thing to say to a mother about her daughters, Mary Jane! They're the best girls in England,—that they are,—and if they wasn't I'd sooner have them twenty times over than a stuck up boy that don't think of nobody but 'imself, and turns his back for good and all on his own flesh and blood as cool as you please!

Mrs. A. And if it's my John you're meaning, it's a fine thing he's doing, going off to defend his country an' that.

Mrs. S. H'm! He'd be doing what was a deal finer if he left that to other folks, and stopped be'ind with those as want him, and are fit to break their silly hearts over him! I've no patience with him, nor with them either.

Mrs. A. (resignedly). Well, we needn't go an' quarrel, Eliza. You're going to keep your girls, any way, an' I've got to lose my dear boy, an' never know no peace so long as he's in furrin parts: for fear he go and get killed, or be springin' a black wife on me one o' these days, as I've heard tell soldiers do, now and agen. . . . Not that there's anyone *here* good enough for my lad, not by a long way! Still, if he *do* marry one day, I'd like it to be a white woman, if so be as I could find his equals anywhere.

Mrs. S. (scornfully). 'His equals,' indeed! Well, there! I never heard the like!; Why he's nothing only a foolish boy, and it'll be long whiles before *any* one go bothering their heads about him, white *or* black!—Robert, have the musicianers come?

Robert. Yes, they're over yonder, Mum.

Mrs. S. Well, we'll have a dance by an' by, lad. May be you'll all get on faster with the hay after it.

Meg. There! I'm sure I've done twice the

work of Dora an' John put together. Dora! you're the laziest girl I ever set eyes on. You've not done hardly nothing, nor John, neither! You don't deserve a dance, John! *I'm* not going to dance with you, so there!

John. You needn't be troublin' yourself, Meg, I warn't goin' to ask you! I be goin' to dance with Dora. . . Ah! but I'll be having better sport nor dancin' very soon. Just think o' bein' in a real battle, and killin' off the enemy like flies!

Dora. Oh, John! how cruel! And they're just as likely to kill *you*.—Oh! I can't a-bear to think of it! If I was a man, I'd go out too, and then we'd *both* be killed! Ah, Johnny, I *couldn't* go on living, not if you was dead; you that's played with me ever since I was a baby.

John (impatiently). Don't talk so silly, Dora! There's plenty o' good fish in the sea, and you shouldn't worry a man so. Can't you let me be?— Oh! I'm sick and tired of this job! I'm tired of everything, I am. (*Drops his rake and throws himself down in the hay.*)

Dora. Oh, Johnny! you're not tired of *us*? Not tired of *me*, are you?

John. Oh! I don't know! Very like I am (*very crossly*): I tell you I'm tired of *everything*. Girls do plague so: go and talk to the others a bit, and leave me be! (*Buries his face.*)

Dora (tearfully). I—don't—want—to—t—t—talk to no one. I'm m—miserable ; I just wish I'd never been born ! (*Puts her apron up to her eyes, and goes slowly away to a corner of the field, where she sits down, and cries silently.*)

Mrs. A. Why, look-a-there, Eliza, just look at your Dora ! She an' my John must have been havin' some words : she's been giving him some of her impidence, I'll be bound !

Mrs. S (*firing up*). Impidence, indeed ! My *Dora*, that's more like a little angel nor anything ? No, *that* ain't the ways of it : it's John been rude to *her*, more like, and took her up sharp, the way he do time and agen, and did ought to be ashamed of himself. *Impidence* ! I like the notion o' that !

Mrs. A. (*plaintively*). Well, you needn't be so down on a body, every time she opens her mouth. But (*sighing*) you always *did* fly out at any one : I mind it was just the same when you was a girl. Deary me, yes — ! And as for John, boys will be boys, Eliza ; you'd ought to remember that.

Mrs. S. Boys will be *men*, got time, Mary Jane,—that's what *I* look to. And I'm sorry for any one, that I am, as has got to live with John, then, if he don't learn to think of other folk's feelin's more'n what he do now. (*Glances at Mrs. A. and relents somewhat.*) There, now ! I don't want to be any ways unkind, but I'd have you to see as

John's only an or'nary boy, an' not be so sot on him, an' think him something out o' the way. He's a good boy enough, though, I daresay, an' he'll get back all right from the wars, see if he don't!

Meg. Dora, how are you getting on over there? *What?* You've never been *crying*! Whatever's the matter?

Dora (pettishly). There's nothing the matter; go away, Meg! I—believe—I've been stung, but I don't want any one looking and bothering!

Meg. Oh, well! you *are* cross, Dora. I'm sure I don't know what's come over you. (*Strolls away again.*)

John (lifting his face). What's that, Dora? Been stung, have you?

Dora. No, not really, John: leastways, if any one's stung me, it was *you*, when you—said—very like you was tired o' me and all of us!

John (springing up). No, no, Dora. I didn't mean that, not a bit: of course I didn't! you shouldn't take a fellow so serious. Come! cheer up, and let's have a dance! You and me'll be partners.

Dora (her face lighting up). Oh, John! that will be nice!— Ah! but how long will it be before we dance together again, John?

John (airily). Oh! not long, I daresay! Chaps mostly come back, you know, and if they don't, well, they *don't*, and there's an

end on it. Come on ! where's the fiddlers ? I'll get them to start. (*He takes her hand, and they run across to the mothers.*)

Dora. Mother, we want the music. Can we have the music ?

Mrs. A. (mournfully). I'm sure I don't know what you want with dancin', all of you I don't 'old with music an' caperin', when there's partin's about ! Next time you dance here, John, it'll be on my grave, most like ! I'll not see you no more, lad ; there's something tells me I'll not see you no more. The light o' my old eyes as you be, too !

John. No, no ! I'll be all right, mother ; don't you go frettin' !

Mrs. S. (briskly gathering up the pods in her apron, and getting to her feet). This 'ere talk's all stuff and nonsense, Mary Jane, that's what it is ! Do give over, and try and be a bit more cheerful ! The boy'll come back, as safe as a church, and we'll all live to wish he'd stopped where he was ; won't we, John ? Now then, boys, tune up your music, and don't waste no more time than what you've done already. I told you to bring your fiddles an' that down to the field this morning. Why didn't you do as you was told ?

Joe and Bill (together). We done, Mum.

Mrs. S. Oh, you done, done you ? Well then, tune up quick, there's good boys. Mary, you'll have to hop around with me : do your old bones good, too !

Mrs. A. *Me* dance? No, thank you, Eliza, I don't feel like dancin': I feel more like settin' 'ere to have a good cry, I do. Joe, that there 'orrible noise o' yours go through my 'ead. To call the like o' that *music*!

Joe (*in an injured tone*). This ain't music, Mis' Arbery; this is *tunin'*, this is. The fiddle's all out o' tune (*with a grimace at Mrs. Smith*) with layin' in the damp grass all this long while.

Mrs. A. Ah, well! There's 'earts out o' tune as well as fiddles this day. Deary me yes! an' plenty o' folks as hasn't *got* 'earts, seemin'ly! Poor Johnny! There's only me an' Dora as cares for 'im out of them all! Dora, what was you cryin' about just now over there?

Dora (*indignantly*). *Crying*? And what would *I* be crying for, Mrs. Arbery? You must have fancied it, or may be it was when I got a fly in my eye a while back. (*With forced gaiety.*) Come on, John, I'm longing to dance! Give us Sir Roger, Bill.

Bill (*nudging Joe*). 'Urry up, Joe! Whatever be you so long for?

Joe. Well, the fiddles bain't in tune together, stupid! You're flatter than me, you are.

Bill. That don't matter. We needn't be so mighty partic'ler; I dessay it's near enough. Come on, now! One, two —

Joe. Where be yer? I dunno which tune you're at. Oh! all right: go on yourself, then. (*They begin "Sir Roger"; all dance.*)

Mrs. A. (*Breaks away from her partner, and clutches a tree, gasping for breath.*) Oh, deary-me! oh deary-me! Let me get my breath, Eliza! you was nearly the death o' me, you was. How my poor heart do beat! An' the idea of a couple o' middle-aged females makin' such a exhibition of their selves!

Mrs. S. That's all gammon, that is! And *I'm* not so middle-aged as all that comes too; you can speak for yourself, if you please! Come on, now, and have another turn!

Mrs. A. (*shaking her head.*) Not me: I've had enough of it, *I* have. If you want to prance any more you can prance by yourself, Eliza Smith, though I'd be ashamed o' myself if I was you! We ain't so young as we was, you'll allow that anyways, an' to go lumberin' about more like a couple o' they old cows in the medder there—, no! it don't suit Mary Jane Arbery, I'll set me down, an' beyave accordin' to my years an' feelin's. (*She does.*)

Mrs. S. (*with a sigh.*) Oh, well! you always *was* one to see the dark side o' things, an', if you *want* to spoil another body's pleasure, well, you must, I s'pose. Listen! There's a cart stopping at the house. Susan! Susan! There's someone at the door. Run, lass, and

see who it is! (*Susan sets off for house. The music stops, and all the dancers throw themselves down exhausted, and fan each other.*)

Mrs. A. (*Solemnly, dropping her knitting*). Look you here, Eliza, it's somethin' about my John; I feel it in my bones. P'raps it's to say the regiment ain't a-goin' out after all! (*Clasps her hands.*) Ah! I'd thank Heaven, I would, if it was that.

Mrs. S. Now don't you go persuadin' yourself of any such thing, Mary Jane, or you'll only be disappointed. But what a time the girl is! Robert! go you after Susan and see what's the matter.

Dora. Oh, John! If it *was* a message to say you wasn't to go to foreign parts after all! Ah! *wouldn't* we all be glad!

John (*crossly*). Glad to spoil a chap's life, an' take away what he's been an' set his heart on? Well, you won't get the chance, Dora, there ain't no fear o' that: we *men* don't go an' change our minds at the last minute, not like a silly girl do!

Meg. That's only because you've not got the sense to change 'em even if you want to, for fear of what folk would say. So we're not as silly as *you*,—come to that!

Rose (*getting up*). You're *all* sillies to get quarreling. Here they are coming back: let's go and see who it was at the door! (*They all join the mothers under the tree.*)

Robert (*breathless*). It's—the sergeant—says—they've——

Mrs. A. (*eagerly*). Didn't I tell you, Eliza?

Mrs. S. Go on, Robert!

Robert. They've had—orders—to start—to-day—'stead o' Saturday—he's got a cart—an' John's got to go, now at once! Susan's a-gettin' down his bag an' all. (*General chorus of "Oh!"s, etc., etc.*)

Mrs. A. (*wailing*). Oh, deary-me! Whoever heard the like o' that? My only boy, to be tore away from his mother, an' not no time for never a word! (*She weeps.*)

John (*patting her shoulder*). Come, mother, don't take on! I'll soon be back again, I will.

Mrs. A. (*still weeping*). Don't tell me! My only boy to be tore away, an' never a word!

Mrs. S. Never you mind, Mary Jane! You passed the remark yourself as it was a fine thing a-goin' out to defend the country. An' so it is, a *grand* thing! Why, when there's soldiers marchin' by, an' a good band playin', I often feel I'd not stick at killin' somebody myself, that I do! There's the sergeant a-hollerin', John; you'd best get off, boy, an' the sooner it's over the better. Good-bye, lad, good-bye, and God bless you! (*They all press round John, and shake hands,—then he kisses his mother.*)

Mrs. A. (*tearfully*). Ah, Johnny, it breaks my heart, so it do, but you—why, lad, you look as if you was *glad* to go an' leave your poor old mother!

John (carelessly). No, no, mother, o' course not: how could you go an' think such a thing! But it's grand to be goin' out to fight them old Russians. There! he's a-shoutin' again,—I *must* go. Good-bye, mother! good-bye! an' take care o' yourself. Good-bye! (*Faint military music heard. He starts off, the others following cheering and waving handkerchiefs. His mother is still weeping, but she too waves her handkerchief. Dora is last, having stopped to choke back her sobs: she calls after him*)—John, John! say good-bye again, John! (*He does not hear, and she begins to run, still calling*)—John! John! (*Her voice dies away in the distance*). John! oh! John!

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EPILOGUE.

(*John Arbery awakes, and stretches out his arms*). “Ay! here I be! did ye call me, Dora? Here I be; here's your John!”

(*He rubs his eyes, and appears greatly bewildered, then stumbles to his feet, and takes a few steps, looking this way and that. Church bells and cuckoo are heard again, and the sound of whistling, and in a moment Thomas Field turns the corner. He comes up to old John, who looks at him with dim eyes.*)

John. Where be my Dora? Have ye seen my lass, young man? She were a callin' an' callin' just now, an' I can't make out where she be,——

Thomas (good naturedly). Don't you worry about no Dora ! You've been asleep, you have, and had a bit of a dream, same as you was wanting to do this dinner time. And now you're coming home along o' me. (*Takes his arm.*)

John (with feeble indignation). Dream ? It warn't no dream, I tell ye I *heard* her,—as plain as I hear them bells . . . —I'm a-comin', Dora ! I'm a-comin' ! *

Thomas (soothingly). There, there ! Come on now ; we ain't got far to go. (*Peals of bells are fainter, cuckoo distant.*)

John (in a weak voice). Thankee, thankee !
 Ay ! you're—a—good lad
 An' I'm glad—there ain't—far to go : I—be—that tired ! (*More feebly*). An' it—be gettin' so dark—all of a sudden ; I can't 'ardly see. . . . Maybe—I'll not—be able to see—my Dora ; not to see—my Dora.

Thomas. No, no ! you'll see her soon enough, no fear o' that. You're goin' straight to 'er, you are !

(*They disappear through the gate, John tottering and clinging to Thomas's arm. Bells die away : Cuckoo has ceased. . . . Hidden voices sing "Hard times, come again no more."*)

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*[*Alternative ending,—for use on an indoor stage,—or in a garden if a curtain can be arranged. John in this case tries to get up, but finds himself too feeble and sinks back.*]

Thomas. There, there! Lay down, an' get you to sleep again! You wont 'ave no need to go to your Dora, I'm thinkin',—more like she'll be comin' to you. She ain't far off now! (*He straightens himself.*)

John (feebly). Not far? Eh! I'm glad she b'aint far,—I be that tired. An' it be getting so dark,—so dark. . . Maybe I'll not be able to see my Dora. (*He holds out his arms.*) I'll not be able to see 'er. (*His voice dies away, and his arms drop.*)

Thomas. Never you fear! You'll see 'er plain enough. (*Bells less faint.*) Eh, poor old chap! (*Stoops and feels John's heart.*) I reckon e'es seen 'er already. God bless 'im! God bless 'im! (*Stands looking at John: bells peal out.*)

CURTAIN.

THE P.Gs.

A Farce Comedy.

Characters :

Billy Danby, an author.

Kitty Danby, his wife.

Dolly Young, her sister.

Christopher Danby, Billy's brother, a rising barrister, and trustee to Kitty and Dolly.

Diana Loveday, a health faddist, and fortune hunter.

Sally Grummitt, a temporary servant, hired in haste.

John Shaw, a watering-place practitioner.

SCENE I.

Scene : A sitting room in the Danbys' house at Staines. Billy Danby is writing, in great haste and with a worried expression, at a table covered with papers. No sound breaks the silence except the squeaking of his quill pen and the ticking of a clock, till the clock strikes nine. Then he gives a great start, looks at the clock, throws down his pen, pushes both hands through his hair, glares round wildly, and, after one more look at the clock, seizes the pen, and begins to write again with feverish energy.

Kitty (off). Well! don't stay out too late! It's getting chilly.

Billy (rising and gathering his papers together). H'm! . . . *Kitty!* Well, that's goodbye to any more work to-night!

Kitty (still off). Billy! Billy! Are you very busy, Billy, or can I come and talk to you?

Billy (throwing all his papers behind the table, snatching up a newspaper, flinging himself into an armchair, and assuming an air of unlimited leisure). Busy? No! Come along! I've nothing to do, and was just wishing you'd come in and amuse me a bit. (*Kitty enters.*) I haven't seen too much of you lately, you know.

Kitty. No; you're generally so busy, aren't you? I say, this is jolly! Let's be cosy and enjoy ourselves! I wonder when the others will come in. (*Takes up some work.*)

Billy. Oh, never mind about the others. We're quite happy by our two selves. (*Rings the bell.*) Now, tell me how you liked the picnic this afternoon!

Kitty. Well! I liked it in a way, but I wished all the time that you were with us. Why must you work so hard at those stuffy papers?

Billy. Bread and butter, my dear child, bread and butter! And you're rather particular about the butter, what? (*To servant who has answered the bell.*) Oh! Has the post come in? Just see, will you?

Mary. Yes, sir!

Billy. These are bad times, you know, Kitty.

Kitty. Oh! Don't let's talk about *bad* times! Let's think of the *good* times we're to have when your book comes out! I want you to build out a room, Billy, that we can keep for dances—do say you will!—and then we'll give some parties, and wake everybody up.

Billy (*to himself, grimly*). H'm. (*to Kitty*) Well, perhaps if there's a great run on my book, and I make a big profit, we'll think about it, Kitty. (*With relief, as the servant appears with letters.*) Ah, letters! (*Sorting them.*) Kitty, all these for you? (*They begin to open letters.*)

Kitty. This is an invitation to Maude's wedding. Very dull and pokey it'll be. I certainly shan't go. Besides, I haven't a rag to go in. . . . Ugh! Mrs. Hunt's At Home! Not for me! . . . Bridge Drive at the Jones's. No thank you! . . . Ah! This is better!

Billy. What!

Kitty. An invitation for the Cricket Week at Canterbury. Oh, Billy! that will be lovely!

Billy (*drily*). But, my dear Kitty, if you haven't a rag to go to a wedding in, you certainly can't go to a Cricket Week, where you'd want five or six rags at least.

Kitty. Oh, it's quite different; but, of course, you're only a man, and wouldn't understand. . . Anything interesting for you, Billy?

Billy. I say, that's good! the Kerrs want Chris and me to go on an expedition with them, shooting in Austria. How would you like that, Kitty, to have your old husband go off and leave you all by yourself? No,—I don't think I see myself. (*Enter Chris.*) Hullo, Chris! You're just in the nick of time. How'd you like to go shooting with the Kerrs in Austria? You're invited.

Chris (moodily). No, thank you.

Kitty. Really, Chris? And they actually asked Billy too, as if he was a bachelor!

Chris. Well, they know he's a crack shot. (*Abruptly.*) Where's Dolly?

(*Billy opens a letter and whistles.*)

Kitty (mischievously). She's playing croquet with the Smith boys from over the way!

Chris. Still?

Kitty. Yes, with fairy lamps tied to the hoops to see by. They're all mad.

Chris (crossly). She'll catch her death of cold. And why can't those wretched Smiths go about their business? They're always hanging round.

Kitty. Well, poor things, I suppose they want a holiday, *occasionally*, like the rest of us. . . Oh! by the way, there's a letter for you, Chris; here it is.

Chris. Well, I shall go and see if Dolly means to come in at all to-night. (*Exit.*)

Kitty. Poor Chris! He's hopelessly gone! But if he's too grandmotherly with Dolly it'll put her off altogether. (*Catching sight of Billy's expression.*) Why, Billy, what's the matter?

Billy. What's the matter? *Everything's* the matter! Just look at this bill from Guy's Stores, sent in to me with an impertinent letter—confoundedly impertinent—demanding payment! How could you dream of running up a bill like that?—and brought up as you were too! What can you say for yourself?

Kitty. Oh, Billy, I'm sorry! I did ask them to wait. How horrid—how *odious* of them! They knew I should pay—they knew—

Billy (impatiently). Never mind what they knew! How did you come to incur a debt like this, when you couldn't pay cash down? That's what I want to know. (*Furiously*) Answer me!

Kitty. Oh, if you're going to take that tone with me I shan't answer at all. How—how *dare* you?

Billy. How dare I, indeed! The question is, how dare *you* get into debt, when you knew how I feel about it?

Kitty (springing up). You shan't speak to me like that, Billy! I'll sell my trinkets, I can always do that; and the old silver—my

share of it—and pay that wretched bill—and then I'll go away.

Billy (drily). Don't talk nonsense, Kitty; what's the good of that? Who wants heroics? That's just like a woman! What we want is (*with provoking calm*) a little plain common sense.

Kitty (scornfully). Plain common sense! who wants plain common sense? *That's* just like a man; and I *shall* sell my trinkets if I *choose* to; I have a perfect right.

Billy (very calmly). You will do nothing of the kind, Kitty. I won't hear of it. (*Enter Chris, reading a letter.*)

Kitty (sneering). Oh, indeed! You won't hear of it! And, pray, how will you prevent it? (*Pauses, then, reflectively.*) If I *don't* sell them it will simply be because I *don't choose*, and because I think proper to do something else. I shall go to that cottage that was left me, at Sidmouth, where no one knows me, and where no one has any right to interfere, and *take paying guests.*

Chris (holding up the letter). Kitty, what's the meaning of this?

Kitty. Oh, Chris! you too?

Billy. Oh, I say—that's too bad, two to one. What's up, Chris?

Chris (handing over the note and a pass-book). Just look at this from the bank. (*To Kitty.*) Were you aware that you'd overdrawn your account?

Kitty. Oh! I told the Manager not to mention it.

Chris. Oh, did you? H'm! Deceit as well as dishonesty; I see! But, happily, the Manager knew his duty and drew my attention to the matter. (*Examining cheque.*) A cheque to yourself for £350—more than your whole income, and leaving you £187 in debt to the Bank!

Billy (*looking over the passbook*). I say, Kitty, what on earth have you done with it?

Kitty. I decline to say.

Billy. Nonsense! you must say.

Kitty. Must, indeed! The money's my own, and I won't say—Now!

Chris (*sarcastically*). H'm! Very fine! especially as more than half the money is the Bank's!

Billy. Come, don't be a fool, Kitty! Just tell me quietly what you have done with the money!

Kitty. I won't! I told you so,—and I don't mean to.

Billy. Kitty, you must; for till I know all about it I shan't lift a finger to help you out of the difficulty.

Kitty. And who wants you to? I can get out of it myself. I don't want your help. I'm going away, as I said. . . .

Billy. Kitty, you're a perfect idiot! Of course we shall have to get you out of this precious muddle.

Chris. When she's made a clean breast of it.

Kitty (scornfully.) Clean breast of it? to you? Pah! (*turning away, and addressing Billy only.*) You can say what you please, but I'll be beholden to neither of you. I shall go to Sidmouth to-morrow, and advertise for paying guests—I don't care a scrap whether you like it or not. And (*very deliberately, watching for the effect*) I shall have *Diana Loveday*; she asked us to let her come as a paying guest last year.

Billy (springing to his feet). That woman? She shall never enter my house!

Kitty. But, you see, it happens not to be *your* house; it's *mine*!

Billy. Whether it's my house or yours, I won't stand by and see you make such a fool of yourself.

Kitty. Well, don't stand by! go after your Austrian game, both of you, and a good thing too!

Billy (quietly). You mean that, *Kitty*? You want me to go?

Kitty. Of course! pray go, both of you, and the sooner the better! No doubt you will be glad to get rid of me. . . . You are going?

Billy. If you wish it. (*Chris bows.*)

Kitty (rushing back). But oh! take care, *Billy*! don't go into danger! . . . Not that it matters, of course . . . but

. . . your . . . your—publishers could'nt spare you. (*Exit in tears.*)

Billy. I needn't tell you I'm not really going, Chris. Kitty may be a little fool, but it's only her ignorance. I shall let her think I've gone, of course, but really I shall stay near and keep my eye on her, poor child. . . . I must think of some plan. But you'll go, Chris? There's sure to be splendid sport.

Chris (*angrily, pacing the room*). I go? Hanged if I will! It's all very well, Billy,—you may be Kitty's husband, but I was left guardian to—both of them. Just think! . . . Kitty taking paying guests, and any bounder coming to the house and seeing . . . I'll . . . (*breaks off, throwing himself into a chair.*) Lor! I have it!

(*Curtain falls on Chris laughing, and Billy watching him in puzzled surprise.*)

SCENE II.

Scene: Dining-room in Kitty's cottage at Sidmouth. Time: About 9 a.m. The table is laid for breakfast. Sally Grummitt is discovered dusting the boards. Bell rings and she looks out of the window.

Sally. All right, milkman! Wait till I gets yer a jug! (*Flapping her duster.*) Lor

How this do make yer back ache! An' such a waste of time, too! Fust motor-car as comes along, the dust lays on everything as bad as ever. An' what a lazy lot they are, too! I might 'ave stopped in bed another 'alf-hour an' it wouldn't 'ave 'urt. Don't believe there's anyone up. (*Rubs window-sill and looks out.*) Oh, yes! 'There's that there Miss Loveday, goin' up and down like a steam-engine. Well, if she ain't the queerest — What? All right! I'm a-coming. (*Exit hurriedly, throwing down duster.*)

(*A sound of throat-clearing and shuffling of footsteps is followed by the slow opening of the door, and the head of Mr. Anthony Larkins appears. He looks round carefully, then throws the door wide open and enters briskly. He wears glasses, and carries a heavy walking-stick. Seating himself at the table, he cuts off a bit of bread, and begins to eat it, loudly counting the bites, with a marked stammer. Hearing footsteps, he rises, hurriedly assumes the stoop of age, and limps to the sofa, leaning heavily on his stick. He sits down. Dolly enters through the window, which she leaves open.*)

Larkins. G — g — good morning, Miss Young!

Dolly (*cheerfully*). Good morning, Mr. Larkins! I wonder if there are any letters for me. (*Goes up to the table and glances through a pile of letters.*)

Larkins (rising with difficulty). Oo! oo! You've l—left the w—winder open! I can't s—sit in such a t—t—terrible draught. The room's l—l—like an ice house. (*Turns up his collar and limps to the window, which he shuts.*) And where is our h—hostess? Why is she not down to s—see after things? (*Comes to table and pinches the loaf.*) What? New bread! Miss Young, does Mrs. D—d—danby not kn—n—now the d—dangers she exposes us to? (*Hobbles over to bell, which he rings continuously, but which gives no sound after the first peal.*) If I were to t—tell you (*turning round*) the effect that new bread has on one's d—digestive organs—

Dolly (hastily). Oh, pray don't, Mr. Larkins! Here; I'll make you some toast. (*She cuts slices of bread, and begins to toast them.*)

Enter Sally What's wanted?

Larkins. Here, c—c—confound you! Why the d—dickens didn't you come at once? Doesn't the c—confounded b—bell ring?

Sally (defiantly). 'Taint likely it would, with me a'-anging on to 'tother end of it for all I was worth. I'd a bin stone deaf by now if I 'adn't. What's wanted?

Larkins (angrily). What's wanted! *Everything's* wanted! (*Glaring at breakfast table.*) It's all p—poison here—p—poison, I tell you. Bring me s—something I can eat!

Sally. Poison? An' you dare to accuse

Sally Grummitt of putting poison in yer food? I'll have the law of yer, I will! Poison, 'e says!

Dolly (turning round from the fire). Oh, don't be silly! Mr. Larkins only means it's poison to *him*, because he can't digest it. Go and get the Plasmon biscuits.

Sally (scornfully). Biscuits for breakfast! Why can't 'e eat like a Christian, same as the rest of us? (*Exit, flouncing. Enter Diana Loveday.*)

Diana. Pouf!—phew! How horribly stuffy! Morning, Dolly! morning, Mr. Larkins! Ugh! Let's get some air blowing! (*Throws open window, and strides up to table.*) I say, no porridge! Look here! I can't begin the day without porridge. (*Rings, and stands rubbing her hands.*)

Larkins. Miss L—loveday; I must beg you to sh—shut that winder, if you don't w—want to k—kill me! (*Shivers violently.*)

Sally (enters with biscuit tin). 'Ere's yer plaster biscuits, sir. (*Bangs tin down on table.*)

Diana. Biscuits? We don't want biscuits. What's the good of dried-up, chippy things like those? We want porridge, Sally, porridge! Quick! And bring some purified cane sugar, too! Hurry up! Bless the woman! (*Turns to window and performs athletic exercises in front of it. Sally watches her, giggling.*)

Larkins. Well ; if you d—don't value my life, Miss Loveday, I must take c—care of it myself. I—I—m—mean to d—disappoint my heirs a l—little longer. (*Exit, returning immediately, struggling into an overcoat.*)

Diana (looking round, but continuing her exercises). Where's the porridge ? What are you standing there staring for, woman ?

Sally. 'Woman ?' Well, I never ! No one's ever been and called me 'woman' before ! If I ain't spoke civil to, I don't do nothing. So Jones can wait on the pair on yer ; I ain't a-going to. (*As she goes out.*) Jones, where are yer ? Come on and take your share of the work !

Jones (off). What's the matter now ? Always grumbling, you are. You go on and dish up that bacon. (*Enters with tray of coffee, etc.*)

Dolly (bringing toast to table)). Here, Mr. Larkins ! This toast is beautifully hot and couldn't hurt a fly. Now, do eat it ! (*Butters it.*)

Larkins. Ah ! m—many thanks, my d—dear young lady ! and now will you do me the f—further favour of sprinkling a little P—plasmon p—p—powder over it ? (*Dolly does so.*)

Diana. Jones, what's the time ?

Jones (arranging coffee, etc.). Twenty past nine, Miss.

Diana. Well, how long have I been at my exercises, then?

Jones. Dunno, I'm sure, Miss, (*muttering*) or care.

Diana. Because if you go on too long it's as bad as if you didn't do 'em at all.

Larkins (eating). You have certainly —1— b—been —2— long enough; and I f—find —3— it most dis—t—turb-ing, Miss Loveday; —4—kindly desist, and —5—s—shut the winder. (*Glares at Diana's back, and knocks stick on floor.*)

Diana (calmly). Oh, of course! It was Sally who was in here when I began. Where has she got to? Growing the oats for the porridge, I should think, by the time she is! Nice house this is, to pay two guineas a week to stay in!

Larkins. Kindly—14—be s—s—silent; I cannot hear—15— myself speak —16— I belong, as I —17— thought I had told you —18— to the ch—ch—ch—19— Chewing Club —20— and I have to bite every mouthful —21— thirty times —22— and count every —23— bite —24, 25, — gulp —26, etc. (*continues up to 30, which he brings out with great triumph.*)

Jones (muttering). Go it, old man, but don't choke yourself! (*places chairs round table.*) (*aloud.*) 'Ere, sir, 'ave yer skull cap, and I'll shut the winder, sir (*hands cap from sideboard.*) Allow me, Miss! The Doctor's

give strick orders Mr. Larkins ain't to 'ave much air, so 'e tells me, Miss; and I'm a-goin' to carry 'em out, I am! (*Essays to shut window.*)

Diana. Don't be impertinent, Jones! and leave that window alone! And if your wife doesn't bring up that porridge——

Jones. My wife, Miss? (*nudging Larkins.*) Meaning Sally, Miss? *She* ain't my wife. I'm only a temporary butler, I am, hired for the season, like. And, if you'll excuse me, Miss, Sally ain't anyways the sort of wife I should a-chosen. I likes a bit o' peace an' quiet, I do.

Diana (heatedly). And I like a bit of porridge when I ask for it! I don't care whether she's your wife or not! You go and tell her I'll get her dismissed if she doesn't bring it up directly! (*Stamps her foot. Jones exit, grimacing: Sally enters with porridge.*)

Larkins. This t—toast —20— is d—d—delicious —21— Miss Young —22—23— Ah! here's that con—f—founded porridge —24— now I suppose there'll be —25— a little p—peace —26—27—28— gulp —29— 30!

Diana (seating herself with great clatter). Well, at last! Hope you've been long enough, Sally! Might have made porridge for a whole orphanage!—Ugh! smoked!

Sally. Smoke's very 'ealthy, Miss—the doctors 'll all tell yer that.

Diana (pushing back her chair). Disgusting! It's too bad! I shall be starved if I go on like this. What are you laughing at, Dolly? Where's the dog? Where's *any* dog? Here! Rover! Fido!

Dolly (laughing helplessly). Oh! we haven't got a dog!

Diana. More shame for you! Anyone who keeps a bad cook ought to keep a dog too, to eat her messes. Then the only thing to do is to burn it. (*Rises, scraping the porridge together, and throws it into fire.*) I never allow a servant to see any waste of mine.

(*Enter Kitty, slowly, absorbed in a fashion paper.*)

Diana (loudly). Kitty, why do you keep such an intolerable cook?

Kitty (looking up). Good morning, everybody! Isn't it a lovely day? (*Rings.*) Why do I what, Diana? Look here, Dolly! This coat would suit you perfectly. (*Leans over Dolly, who studies the paper with her.*)

Diana (at the table again). I said, why do you keep such a beast of a cook? I'd send her packing at an hour's notice if she was mine.

(*Enter Jones.*)

Kitty. Oh, Jones, just bring me some fresh bacon, please! This is so cold and nasty.

Jones. Yes, mum. (*Exit.*)

Larkins (perceiving the smell of Diana's porridge in the fire). Oh! what a h—h—

horrible smell ! Ugh, ugh ! What a n—nasty t—trick. And I have lost c—count of my ch—chewing, and shall have to b—b—begin again ! I am—I—surprised at you —2— Miss Loveday —3—4—5, etc.

Diana (drinking off a cup of tea at a draught). And I'm surprised at you, making yourself a nuisance to everybody with your —I—2— (gulp) 3— (gulp) —4 ! I'll trouble you to *whisper* your bites in future ; then there'll be a chance for other folk to hear the sound of their own voices.

Larkins (angrily and stammering very much). It's better to make noises than such a c—c—confounded bad smell !

Diana. Stuff and nonsense ! Just give me another cup, will you, Kitty ? No, you, Dolly. Kitty's dreaming, as usual. Tzk ! tzk ! tzk !

Kitty (vaguely). Oh no ! I'm all right. (*Holding the teapot aloft, she pours a steady stream over the cloth and milk jug—still reading.*)

Dolly (springing up). Oh, Kitty, you pig ! Look what you're doing ! Here ! Give it to me ! (*Seizes teapot and rings bell ; then calls for a duster.*)

Kitty (starting). Oh, I'm so sorry ! How stupid of me ! (*General uproar. Sally enters with duster. Exeunt Kitty and Dolly. Larkins retreats to a sofa,—Diana to a chair.*)

Sally (slopping up tea). Of all the 'orrid

messes! I ain't a-going to stop here, Mr. Jones, and so I tells yer. There's no rest for the soles of my boots, so there ain't! And it isn't the kinds of goings-on that I've been used to. Just look at 'er, now. (*Exit.*)

Diana (to Jones,—practising deep breathing, and sitting rigidly on her chair). Look sharp with your work! You disturb me at my breathing exercises. No! I'll go to the other room. You come, too, Mr. Larkins! I'll show you how to do them. Make a new man of you! Come along!

Jones (as Larkins follows Diana out). Cheer oh! Chris! Nice little tête-à-tête with the fair Diana, what? (*To Sally, as she re-enters.*) Well, she do 'ave some queer ways, together, don't she? She'd ought to breathe by the light of nature, same as me, or any other Christian body. But, between you an' me, if she was to stop breathing altogether it wouldn't upset me a great lot. A most onnatural female, I calls 'er! Wants a good strick 'usband, she do, to knock some sense into 'er 'ead. It's what you want, too, if I ain't mistaken, Mrs. Sally!

Sally (tossing her head). Oh! I'm not one for 'usbands, unless they're something quite out of the common; I don't 'old with men, not as a rule. But (*archly*) 'ow is it you ain't suited yerself, Mr. Jones?

Jones. Ah! you're all alike, you women—all the same; so curous! You take my

advice, and stick to what concerns you, young woman !

Sally. Well, certainly *that* don't, Mr. Jones. If you've fifty wives, it's nothing to me. But most like you've never been able to get any-one to look at you—with that face ! More like a old gollywog than anythink, *you* are. (*Bell.*) Ow ! There's that dratted doorbell ! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Diana and Larkins.*)

Diana. No peace anywhere ! Never saw such a house ! Why can't Kitty and Dolly practice their wretched squalling later in the day ? Now, look here, Mr. Larkins, you draw in a long breath—so !

Larkins (*grimacing at Jones*). Ex-actly so !

Diana. And then you exhale it—so !

Larkins. H—h—anged if I will ! If it's to take all that trouble to get a breath—I'll s—stick to it when I've got it.

Diana. But you don't understand the science of it, the wonderful science. What's the good of anything, if you don't know how to preserve the vital spark ? Now I'll show you Dr. Bright's little work on "Deep Breathing." (*They retire to the sofa.*)

(*Enter Kitty and Dolly, followed by Sally, carrying some cardboard boxes.*)

Kitty. Put them down, Sally ! Now, Dolly, let's have a look at these !

Dolly. But, Kitty dear, you really ought to order lunch. Do attend to that first !

Kitty. Lunch? Oh, never mind lunch! We've only just done breakfast, and I must look at these hats.

Dolly. Well, look here! You tell me what you'll have for lunch, and I'll write it down! (*Takes up pencil and paper.*)

Kitty. Yes, all right! Oh, that's rather nice! Jones, bring me a looking-glass, will you? (*Jones, who is clearing the table, obeys.*)

Dolly (rapping with pencil). There's the cold beef: we'd better have that done up somehow.

Kitty. Yes, it would go admirably with my blue frock, wouldn't it, Dolly?

Dolly. Shepherd's Pie?

Kitty. No,—not the shepherd's plaid—I said the blue one.

Dolly (incisively). I said—shall—the—beef—be—made—into—shepherd's—pie?

Kitty (vaguely). Oh, yes, I think so! And I like this one, but it wants trimming with a different colour, don't you think?

Dolly. Rhubarb?

Kitty. Oh, no! mole-colour, perhaps.

Dolly. Oh, Kitty, you're hopeless!

Diana. Bless the woman! Better let *me* order lunch. . . Hate your hashed up messes! Give *me* good wholesome nuts, and peas and beans.

Larkins. Beans? With the g—greatest p—pleasure!

Diana. What?

Larkins. Oh! N—nothing! N—nothing at all!

(Bell rings.)

Dolly. Who can it be?

(Jones exit to hall. Kitty and Dolly make a very half-hearted attempt to clear the floor.)

Jones (announcing). Dr. Shaw.

Kitty. Oh! Good morning, Dr. Shaw!
(They shake hands: Shaw shows throughout obvious admiration for Kitty.)

Shaw. Good morning, Miss Loveday. I've just come over, as you asked me——

Kitty. Oh, I'm not Miss Loveday. Diana, you didn't tell me you were expecting Dr. Shaw.

Diana. How do you do, Dr. Shaw? Why, Kitty! I thought you knew by this time that I always put myself in the hands of the local doctor the minute I get to a new place.

Shaw. An excellent practice.

Larkins (sotto voce). For the doctor!

Kitty. Would you like to go into the drawing-room?

Diana. Bless you, no! (Putting out her tongue). Well, doctor, how's the tongue?

Shaw. Ah, pretty bad, Miss Loveday, pretty bad! Let me feel your pulse. (Feels pulse, but has eyes only for Kitty.) Yes! I'm glad you called me in in time; you want a thorough toning-up.

Larkins. H—have a l—look at me, doctor, will you? when you've done with her.

Shaw (taking out watch). Certainly—certainly! (*To Diana, but watching Kitty*). Yes,—the pulse is very unsteady, very unsteady: no cause for alarm, but care needed, and watchfulness. Yes, I must send something round for you to take, and (*looking at Kitty*) I'll look in to-morrow and see how you're getting on. Thank you! thank you! Now, sir! (*He feels Larkins' pulse and inspects his tongue. Exit Dolly, giggling.*)

Kitty (turning round from glass). How do you like this, everybody?

Diana. Outlandish! You'd be mobbed in the street.

Shaw (forsaking Larkins with a gesture, dismissing his ailments as nothings). If you will pardon the liberty, I think it ravishing—quite ravishing.

Kitty. That's very nice of you, Dr. Shaw. I'll keep that one anyhow. Diana, you're no judge of millinery. (*To Shaw*). I'm afraid I must run away now, good-bye!

Shaw. Ah, good-bye! and (*looking with distaste at Diana and Larkins*) I'm just off too. (*Exit Kitty.*) Good-bye, Miss Loveday! I'll look in to-morrow about the same time. Good-morning, sir! (*Exit.*)

Diana. Now for a toddle. Come with me, Mr. Larkins: it'll do you good.

Larkins (grimacing hideously behind her back). Ex-actly so! But I walk sl—sl—slowly; m—more accustomed to d—driving, don't you know?

Diana (eagerly). Very well off, then?

Larkins (smiling). Ex-actly!

Diana. Ah well! we'll take it easy.

(Exeunt, Larkins prancing and grimacing behind Diana).

(Enter Sally, carrying a tea caddy, and singing raucously. She drops the song and the caddy on seeing the hats). Oh my! ain't they splendid? 'Ere! Mr. Jones! Wouldn't I look a duchess in a 'at like this? *(Puts on a hat on the top of her cap and looks in the glass.)* 'Ow, I forgot my cap! *(Takes it off)* and my face ain't as clean as it might be.

Jones (who has followed her). Well, that don't make much odds! You'd look a sight anyway!

Sally (tries on a picture hat). Ah! that suits me down to the ground, that do, throws a becoming shadder, and 'ides the smuts a bit.

Jones. You stow it, Sally, or I'll tell the mistress: see if I don't.

Sally. You mind your own business, Mr. Jones! I'm only putting the 'ats away. Left all over the place, they was. *(Claps toque on his head.)* 'Ows that suit your style o' beauty, eh?

Jones. You impudent hussy! Put them 'ats back, or I'll get you sacked, as sure as eggs is eggs!

Sally. Go on, yer great sawney! Cooks don't grow on every bush, as you'd oughter

know by this time. (*Impressively.*) If I was to leave 'ere, there's 'undreds of families 'd go down on their bended knees to 'ave me.

Kitty (*off*). Sally, Sally!

Jones. 'There yer are! You'd a bin caught in a minute—and served you right too. 'Ere! Shove 'em in quick, and let's get 'em into the 'all! (*They collect the hats hurriedly.*)

Sally. I'm a-comin', Mum! I'm a-comin'!
(*Exeunt.*)

CURTAIN.

SCENE III.

Scene: As before. Time, six days later, about 5 p.m. Larkins is reading a paper in an arm-chair—Kitty watering plants—and Dr. Shaw standing near, watching her,—obviously anxious to get rid of Larkins.

Shaw. Yes, I'm really proud of my patients, quite proud of them. (*Turns and slaps Larkins on the back.*) We'll have you a well man in no time, sir,—you're getting on splendidly. (*Impressively, and with increasing emphasis.*) But there's one thing you ought to have, and that is more exercise—regular exercise, out-of-door exercise! (*Jones enters and fusses about at the sideboard, watching*

Kitty and the Doctor.) Now (*taking Larkins playfully by the arm*), let me recommend you to have some straight away,—best thing in the world after tea! ‘Ten minutes’ steady exercise up and down the verandah—come!

Larkins (perceiving his object). Ah! but I d—don’t feel up to it t—to-day, Doctor.

Shaw (annoyed). Not up to it? Nonsense! Ah! I’m afraid we’re *lazy*—that’s what it is! Come now!

Larkins. It almost l—l—looks as if you w—wanted to g—get rid of me!

Shaw (exasperated). Nonsense! (*Goes up to Kitty*). If you’ll pardon me, Mrs. Danby (*lowering his voice*) you’re not looking quite the thing this evening; and with all this influenza about, you know, one mustn’t trifle with even the slightest trouble. Let me feel your pulse—may I? (*takes her hand*) And if I might have a word or two—

Jones (who has shown signs of great restiveness, and drawn gradually nearer to Shaw, now speaks aggressively). Excuse me, sir, but there’s some boys ‘anging about and meddling with your car; you’d best be after ‘em, sir.

Kitty. Jones! what do you mean? Go at once, and send them off yourself! I never heard of such a liberty! Come, Dr. Shaw, we’ll go into the other room, where we can see the motor from the window. (*Exeunt.*)

Larkins. Poor fellow! He doesn’t know what’s in store for him! J—Jones! bring me

my cordial d—directly! Lor, Billy, I do love to make you skip! (*Exit Jones*). Oh, I'd give a year of my life to take off these confounded whiskers! (*He sits down. Jones reappears with glasses.*)

Jones. Here's your drink, old chap; and I'm jolly well going to have some myself too. (*Does so, throwing himself into a chair.*)

Larkins. Look here, Billy! I want to tell you I've made up my mind to propose to Dolly.

Jones. Well, you've made up your mind to do that a good many times before, haven't you? But you've always funk'd it in the end.

Larkins. Yes! because if she were to refuse me, in my position as trustee, and so forth, it would be a deuced awkward situation; impossible one, in fact. I've often told you so.

Jones. Well, but the situation isn't changed now, is it?

Larkins. No, but look here. I'm not going to propose to her as Christopher Danby, but as A—A—Anthony L—L—Larkins, don't you know? Of course, she'll refuse me with disgust, but it's just possible I might find out how the land lies for the other thing. I'm going to propose straight away. I couldn't stand this business much longer. Do you know, that woman Diana has been making up to me all the week?

Jones. And do you know that confounded doctor—that insolent young puppy—has been making up to Kitty?—to my wife, Chris! Feeling her pulse, indeed! I'd like him to feel the toe of my boot!

Larkins. Oh, yes, I saw it all, old boy, and I've been wondering when you'd boil over. Hullo, there's someone coming! It's Dolly. Now do get out, there's a good fellow, and take your glass with you! (*Exit Jones; enter Dolly.*)

Dolly. Hullo, Mr. Larkins! having something to buck you up? (*Sits down opposite him.*) Do you know I think you've really got better since you came here?

Larkins. B—better, n—no,—w—worse: I've—I've—I've got something on my mind.

Dolly. Oh, have you? Is it anything I could help you in, do you think?

Larkins. Ex—actly so; I have f—fallen in l—l—love!

Dolly. Fallen in love? Oh how fun—I mean, how romantic! And have you proposed yet?

Larkins. N—no! I'm afraid she might refuse me,—and I'm an old f—fellow—and I c—c—couldn't get over it, you know.

Dolly. Oh, *poor* Mr. Larkins! But you're not so *very* old after all.

Larkins. Ah—but r—relatively to the fair one, Miss Young.

Dolly. Oh, but some girls *like* marrying

older men. For my part, I can't imagine how any girl *can* marry a man as young as she is, or younger. A husband should be at least (*considers*) ten years older than his wife, I think.

Larkins. Oh! Then you w—w—wouldn't marry a l—lad of twenty?

Dolly. Oh, no, of course not! I shouldn't *dream* of it.

Larkins. You w—would *prefer* someone older?

Dolly. Yes, indeed! But who is the lady, Mr. Larkins? Do I know her?

Larkins. You know her b—better than anyone else could, be—c—cause you *are*—

Dolly (springing up, horror-struck). Oh, not *me*? You don't mean me?

Larkins. Ex—actly!

Dolly. Oh, how dreadful! Oh, how ridiculous! Really, Mr. Larkins, I couldn't! How could you think of such a thing?

Larkins. But you s—said you *p—preferred* older men——

Dolly. Oh, yes! but—but, yes,—but——

Larkins. You think me ec—centric?

Dolly. Oh, no, of course not!—only—only——

Larkins. You d—d—despise me? (*Covers his face and groans.*)

Dolly (running to him). Oh, no, Mr. Larkins! I've got—got—quite fond of you but—Oh! what *can* I say?

Larkins. T—tell me the ex—act truth!

Dolly. Well, then, I—I—love—someone else. (*Rising and turning away*). But you must never tell *anyone*,—not a soul!

Larkins. And d—does he l—l—love you?

Dolly. Oh, I don't know! (*sighs*). Sometimes I feel certain he does, and then, sometimes—but he can't really, or surely he'd say so.

Larkins. Perhaps h—he's af—fraid of being—refused, too.

Dolly. Oh, no! It can't be that,—for he *must* know—why! he's known us all our lives—he looks after all our business.

Larkins (starting up). Dolly! 'Then it is I!

Dolly (starting back). Wha—at? *Chris?*

Chris (à la Larkins). Ex—actly so!

Dolly. 'Then it was *you*, all the time? But how *could* it be? And, oh! how mean of you! Oh! if only I'd known!

Chris. Ah! But you didn't know, Dolly! And you really love your old *Chris*, and nobody else?

Dolly. Yes, of course! But (*looking towards door*) oh! *Chris*, do be careful! I'm sure someone's coming. And (*drawing back*) I really couldn't with that dreadful old beard.

Chris (preparing to remove his disguise). Bother the beard! Oh! but here is someone coming—I say, let's hide in the conservatory. (*Exeunt. Jones enters, and puts away silver in the sideboard. Kitty and Shaw enter by the*

other door. Jones is hidden from them by the screen, and cannot leave the room without coming out where they can see him.)

Kitty. Well, I'm dreadfully sorry, Dr. Shaw. I'm afraid I've been very careless and foolish, but I never thought, never dreamed of such a thing!

Dr. Shaw. What? Couldn't you see—?

Kitty. No. You see I know so well *myself* that I'm not a widow, I forgot other people *mightn't*! But you'll soon get over it. Just think! you've only known me a week!

Dr. Shaw (*moodily*). A week or a year,—where's the difference?

Kitty (*persuasively*). Oh, but there is! And you must forget me just as quickly. . . . I have the best husband in the world, Dr. Shaw, but we—we quarrelled.

Dr. Shaw. Oh! quarrelled?

Kitty. Yes! He thought I'd been extravagant, and I was too proud to explain. So you see (*smilingly*) I should be a bad bargain even if I were free, shouldn't I?

Shaw (*gravely*). I don't think so.

Kitty. Oh, yes, I should! But we needn't argue about that. You must find someone *much* nicer than I am, and be as happy as you deserve. . . . Goodbye, Dr. Shaw! . . .

Dr. Shaw (*grasping her hand, and looking into her eyes*). Goodbye. . . I'm very sorry. . . Goodbye! (*Exit Dr. Shaw.*)

(*Kitty strolls across to the table, picks up a book, and begins to read.*)

Jones (*appearing round screen*). So I'm the best husband in the world, am I, Kitty?

Kitty. Billy!! Billy!! You,—Billy! But—are you *Jones*? I mean, was *Jones* you?

Billy (*bowing*). The late Mr. Jones, at your service!

Kitty. Oh! And you were *listening*!

Billy. Well, I couldn't help hearing, of course: there I was caught like a rat in a trap, and couldn't get away. And you really thought I'd go and leave you to your own devices, poor little thing? Not I! So I answered your advertisement for a servant, and I was in a blue funk lest you shouldn't take me. But I knew what a warm little heart you had, so I thought the appeal in my letter would fetch you. And it did, didn't it? (*With a change in his voice*). But I say, you might have let that poor chap know you'd got a husband fooling around somewhere.

Kitty. Well, but how could I imagine he was going to propose?—and before I had known him a week, too!

Billy (*sombrely, à la Shaw*). “A week or a year,—where's the difference?” I soon saw which way the wind blew! Poor fellow! Well, never mind! But look here, Kitty, I know all about that money now. Lor'! Just a loan to a good-for-nothing brother,—

and we thought it had all gone in ball gowns and hats and goodness knows what! But why didn't you ask *me* to help the silly ass?

Kitty. Oh, I couldn't! You were so frightfully worried just then about your new book,—I really couldn't bother you.

Billy. Well, it's all right now, isn't it? And Jackson's have given me splendid terms for the book. I heard from them this morning. So now Chris and I will chuck up our beastly disguises.

Kitty. *Chris? Chris?* What on earth has Chris got to do with it? He's in Austria.

Billy. Oh! is he, indeed? In Austria! What price good old Anthony Larkins a-chasing of the bold bad bear?

Kitty. *Wha—at? Anthony Larkins!* . . . You don't mean to say . . . ? (*Laughing.*) Anthony Larkins! Oh dear! Oh dear! . . . (*Laughing.*) I shall never get over it! (*Laughs,—peal after peal. Then—recovering herself*)—Then of course now *I* can chuck the P.G's and go home. And give Sally notice! By the way, Billy, how could you stand Sally?

Billy. You can stand a good deal when you've a little wife to take care of, Kitty. But, I say, here's Diana! (*He removes his whiskers, etc.*) You get away, and I'll interview her. What a shock she'll have! She thinks I've gone to Austria. (*Exit Kitty; enter Diana.*)

Diana (off). Never saw such a house for not being able to find anyone. Where on earth they all get to I can't think! (*Enters.*) What? *William*? I thought you were hundreds of miles away. (*They shake hands.*)

Billy. Yes, but you see I heard you were here, and of course I posted back so as not to miss you.

Diana. And has Christopher come back too?

Billy. Oh, come! I'm not responsible for my brother, you know. Can't tell you anything about him. (*Sitting down.*) Where's everybody?

Diana. That's just what *I* want to know. Kitty, I suppose, idling somewhere. I can tell you it's high time you came back and looked after her. And Sally's nowhere to be found; probably gossiping with the postman in the road. Jones has disappeared, too—gone to a publichouse most likely, though Kitty's such a fool she won't believe they're all rascals together.

Billy. Now don't you be so uncharitable, Diana! How do you know (*with a wink unnoticed by Diana*) poor Jones didn't go to meet his wife?

Diana. Faugh!—wife! what nonsense! He hasn't got one, so far as I'm aware. And Mr. Larkins has vanished too.

Billy (carelessly). Who's Larkins?

Diana (smiling complacently). A very pleasant old gentleman staying here.

Billy (smiling also). Got a fortune, Diana?

Diana. I fail to see why you ask that, William, unless out of ill nature. He is rather infirm at present——

Billy (jumping up). Then he can't have run far: I expect I can hunt him up for you. (*Going to door, turns back.*) But I say, Diana, you'll have to be looking out for other quarters, you know, for I'm going to take my wife home. I'm not going to have her taking P.G's—not likely! O! here she is! (*Exit, whistling. Enter Kitty.*) Well, Diana, weren't you surprised to see Billy? Find him pretty cheerful?

Diana. Detestable as ever! Certainly the most disagreeable man of my acquaintance. What you can ever have seen in him I can't imagine. An author, too, living from hand to mouth! Now Anthony Larkins, with an established income, what a different picture! Of course he's full of fads and fancies, but a strong-minded wife could easily knock them out of him.

Kitty. Are you going to undertake the task?

Diana (bridling). I think Mr Larkins feels how good it would be for him—(*suddenly seeing Sally, who has entered slowly, reading the postcards among the correspondence she is bringing in, and has just come to a standstill, quite absorbed*). Sally! How dare you? What do you mean by such conduct?

Sally (*starting violently*). Ow! I—I—I wasn't sure one of 'em wasn't for me, miss.

Diana (*contemptuously*). Don't tell lies! It doesn't improve matters. And the letters ought to have been here an hour ago. I suppose you were gossiping with the postman, and hindering him in his duties.

Sally. *Me* gossip? I always minds my own business, I do.

Diana. Yes! That's what you were doing as you came in, wasn't it? Is that for me? (*Takes a letter,—looks surprised at the handwriting,—and reads with an expression of growing satisfaction.*)

Kitty. Sally, don't be impertinent! Go to the kitchen!

Sally (*with a grimace at Diana*). I'm agoin', mum; never fear!

Kitty (*seeing a fatuous smile on Diana's face*). What have you got there, Diana?

Diana. A propo—; Ahem! A letter from Geoffrey Dean—dear old Geoffrey, after all these years!

Kitty. Oh! do let me hear it!

Diana (*reading*).

"Dear Diana,

"It is a long time since I heard of you, but I hope you are very fit and well. I have a very flourishing Hydro here, which pays me *moderately* well. My patients are all comfortably off, and do not worry me unduly. But a wife who would take the

household cares on her shoulders would be a great help to me. How would *you* fancy the post? We always went straight to the point, you and I, so I make no apology for my manner of putting it,—but let me know at once! You know what I am,—so I will not waste good ink and paper in telling you; and I know what you *were*, not so long ago, and it's fifty to one against your ever changing. But, if you won't change your ways, you might change your name; and what do you think of 'Diana Dean'?

"Yours eyer,

"GEOFFREY."

How like Geoffrey! How *just* like Geoffrey!

Kitty. "Pays him *moderately* well!"

Only *moderately*! I don't like that. No, Diana! If I could anyhow land the Larkins *salmon* I wouldn't bother about a little *minnow* like Geoffrey,—though he might do possibly,—*faute de mieux*. (*Larkins is heard coughing.*) Ah! There's Mr. Larkins coming, so I'll leave the coast clear! (*Exit.*)

Diana (*as Chris enters*). Do take pity on me, Mr. Larkins! I'm all alone (*ogling*).

Chris. Ex-actly so.

Diana (*patting sofa*). Come and sit here, Mr. Larkins, I'm feeling rather down, and perhaps you could cheer me up a little.

Chris. Certainly! (*sitting down heavily.*) With the g—greatest p—pleasure!

Diana. You know, I used to like being

alone,—but *now*, somehow, (*sighs*) I don't care for it.

Chris. Ex-actly so!

Diana. In fact, I think it's bad for one to be alone,—don't you?

Chris. Ex-actly so!

Diana. I'm sure you dislike being alone yourself, Mr. Larkins?

Chris. Ex-actly so!

Diana. You are well off, of course, I know; but riches, with no one to share them—(*sighing deeply*).

Chris. I'm afraid you m—must have in—d—digestion, you s—s—sigh so!

Diana. Oh, no! it isn't that: it's—er—heart, Mr. Larkins.

Chris. Oh! Heart! I'm h—h—heartily glad to hear it (*chuckles*).

Diana. Glad? You mistake what I said—

Chris. P—pardon me, Miss L—Loveday, but the m—mistake is *yours*!

Diana. *Mine*? What are you talking about?

Chris. Yes, y—yours—exactly! yours! You've mistaken the year. This is *n—not leap year*.

Diana (*springing to her feet*). How dare you? Do you mean to insult me? Do you insinuate—?

Chris (*who has risen also*). I in—insinuate nothing; I m—merely rec—commend you to take your l—little heart af—f—fection elsewhere!

Diana. Elsewhere! I should think so! The same roof shall not shelter us both another hour! I leave instantly, you rude, hateful, intolerable creature—horrid, insulting brute!

Chris. C—c—calm yourself! I shall tell no one of your l—little m—mistake about the year.

Diana. Mistake? It's *you* that are making the mistake! I'd have you to know that I received an offer of marriage this very day from an old friend—a *man*, worthy of the name, not a hypochondriacal worm! And I can tell you you're not fit to black his boots! Why, I wouldn't pick you up with the tongs!

Chris (*backing towards the door*). Ex-actly so. D—delighted to hear it, Madam.

Diana. And I'm writing to accept him, and will shake the dust of this hateful place off my feet before I am an hour older.

Chris (*outside — but with his head round the door*). Ex-actly so! (*Exit.*)

Diana (*calling to Sally and ringing the bell violently*). Sally! (*Enter Sally.*) Pack my box instantly,—this minute! I have bad news from home and must leave here to-night: (*stamping*) Do you hear? (*Exit.*)

Sally. Oh, yes, Miss, I hear!' (*Addressing Diana's retreating form*). What's the good of yer stuffing me up it was news from 'ome, when I knows it was the old gent? You've

'ad an escape, though, you 'ave! Fancy settin' opposite a stuttering old pot-'ook like 'im all the days of yer life! (*Exit. Billy, Kitty, and Dolly have appeared at the window, unseen by Sally during the last speech. Chris, undisguised, now joins them, and all enter.*)

Dolly. Are you quite sure you have got rid of her, Chris?

Chris. Oh, yes! I've got rid of her all right! And—did you hear that she's had a proposal from an old pal? I shouldn't wonder if she's rushing off to nail him to his promise.

Dolly. A proposal? Has she? *Diana?* Well! Tastes differ,—don't they? luckily for all of us.

Sally (bursting in from hall). Please, 'm, where's Jones? I can't find 'im; an' I want 'im to carry Miss Loveday's boxes, Mum.

Kitty. Jones? . . . Oh, . . . I'm afraid he isn't here, Sally! Mr. Larkins has gone away suddenly, and taken Jones with him.

Sally (holding her heart). Gorn away, suddent,—taken Jones with 'im! Lor, Mum, 'ave yer counted the spoons? Oh, they've been and gone and robbed you,—take my word for it! I always knew they was up to no good! (*To Chris.*) And you're the detective, of course, sir? Well, sir, don't be 'ard on Jones! I've a soft spot in me 'eart for Jones, though 'e *were* such a queer old

body to look at. And 'e was led away by the old gent, sir, you *may* depend. I daresay 'e wouldn't 'ave been good enough for me, as things 'as turned out; but, lor, it 'as upset me! I'll go upstairs and 'ave a good cry. It'll do me good. (*Exit, sobbing loudly.*)

Chris. Ex—actly s—so!

CURTAIN.

“THEM BANNS.”

“THE TOOLIP.”

“WRONG AGAIN.”

"THEM BANNS."

A SKETCH.

Characters :

Mrs. Brown.

Tom Jones.

Ellen.

Scene : Back hall at the Vicarage.

Time : Present day.

(Bell rings off: enter Ellen L: she crosses to door R: bell rings again).

Ellen. Bless the bell ! *(opens door).* Oh ! it's you, Tom.

Tom. It is. You look as fresh as a daisy, you do.

Ellen. Go on !

Tom. Is the Vicar in ? I want to see 'im very particler.

Ellen. No, he isn't. But you can see the missis, if *she's* any good.

Tom (coming in). Oh ! I dessay she'll do. She can give a message to 'er 'usband, I s'pose.

Ellen. Well, you sit down. She's over at the school, but she won't be long . *(She*

sweeps up hearth.) Let's see,—you're to be called in Church to-morrow, you and Mary Ann, ain't you?

Tom. Ah! . . . So you've 'eard that!

Ellen. Of course I 'ave.

Tom. 'Oo've you been gossipin' with?

Ellen. *Gossipin'!* Well, I'm sure! You and Mary Ann ain't much to *gossip* about! Been keeping company half a life time, haven't you? (*Straightens furniture.*) Why, you'll soon be grey-'eaded, the pair of you!

Tom (*anxiously touching his hair*). Well, a grey 'air or two don't 'urt. . . . Look 'ere, my girl, would you call me a *personable* man, now?

Ellen (*regarding him critically*). Well,—y—yes,—I shouldn't call you a bad-looking chap. (*Coyly.*) And when you're smartened up, same as you was at the Social the other night, you look real *nice*.

Tom (*pulling down waistcoat, and smiling complacently*). Ah!—Not a feller a girl 'ud be ashamed to be seen with, eh? (*stroking his chin, and scowling*). 'Ow did you think Mary Ann looked?

Ellen (*with a scornful laugh*). Oh! She didn't look like nothing at all! But then she don't set up for looks, do she? (*Listens.*) There's the missis! she mustn't catch me here jawing to you. (*Exit hurriedly L. Jones examines himself with obvious gratification in*

the glass, but moves away as Mrs. Brown comes in L. Mrs. Brown is intensely well meaning and unworldly).

Mrs. Brown. Good morning, Jones. You want to see the Vicar about something very special, Ellen tells me.

Tom. Yes, mum. About them banns o' mine.

Mrs. Brown (sits C.). Oh, yes! Sit down. (Tom sits on edge of chair L.). They are to be put up to-morrow, are they not?

Tom (twirling his hat, and shuffling his feet). Yes, mum, they is. . . Leastways, they was.

Mrs. Brown. Oh? Anything the matter?

Tom. Well, mum, I'm in a bit of a 'ole, mum.

Mrs. Brown (in a tone of earnest concern). A hole, Jones? I'm sorry to hear that. Is Mary Ann, er—not (ahem) willing?

Tom. Oh, yes, mum! She's willing, but I ain't!

Mrs. Brown. But how shocking! Really, Jones——

Tom. No, mum, it's no use your talkin'. It's 'er overbearin' temper, an' I can't put up with it no more. . . You know the old sayin', mum, "Marry in 'aste"——

Mrs. Brown. Haste? Haven't you been keeping company eight years?

Tom. We 'ave. An' that's what's brought it 'ome to me, the kind o' woman she is. I

ain't made for a 'en-pecked 'usban', I ain't, an' if 'er an' me got spliced, there'd be words in the 'ome before the day was out.

Mrs. Brown (with a pained look). Oh, but Jones, "Birds in their little nests agree," or *should* do. Surely if you *spoke* to Mary Ann?

Tom (with scorn). *Spoke* to 'er! I've spoke till I'm fair sick on it. But she's as obstinate as a ole pig, she is.

Mrs. Brown (shaking her head). It's very wrong to talk so. Besides, we *all* have our faults.

Tom. We 'ave, mum. But there's faults *and* faults, and a cantankerous female ain't to be borne with, not as a wife. I've thought so many a time, but I 'adn't the sperrit to back out o' the job. (*Reflectively.*) An' then again, of course, she 'as got a nice little 'ome, an' a tidy business, an' I'd only 'ave to 'ang up my 'at there, an' take it easy, if I could but stummick Mary Ann. But there! I *can't*. I'd sooner face a angry bull than a narsty tempered woman, an' as for livin' with 'er, year in an' year out—

Mrs. Brown. But—er—suppose she should *sue* you, for breach of promise?

Tom (grinning). She won't do *that*, mum; I made sure o' *that*, first thing! . . .
"Bless yer, no!" she says, "it wouldn't break *my* 'eart to lose yer" she says. "But you've passed me your word," she says, "an' I'll 'old you *to* it," she says, "till you

can tell me you're ackshally promised to another woman," she says.

Mrs. Brown (drawing herself up). Really!

Tom. Yes, mum. Them was 'er words. "An' I don't believe," she says, "'as there's another woman in the parish as 'ud look at yer!" she says, "leave alone as our banns 'll be called termorrer!" she says, an' starts a-larfin', fit to bust 'erself!

Mrs. Brown. Most unseemly! I see nothing to laugh at. (*Gets up.*) Well, I suppose you would like the Vicar to put off publishing the banns for the present? which will, of course, bring Mary Ann to her senses.

. . . Is not that your idea?

Tom (who has also risen). Well, mum, what I should like first of all, if you've no objections, is to set 'ere for five minutes, and think it over, quiet-like.

Mrs. Brown. Very sensible, indeed, Jones. Don't act in a hurry, whatever you do.

Tom (meekly). No, mum.

Mrs. Brown. You just think it well over. (*Goes to door L. and turns.*) Who knows but what you and Mary Ann might shake down perfectly?

Tom. I'm afraid it 'ud take a deal o' shakin', mum; a deal o' shakin'! (*Exit*

Mrs. Brown. Tom grins broadly as the door shuts, and then breaks into a chuckle, after which he goes to window and whistles twice.) Ah! There yer are, my girl.

Ellen (at window). Oh! I didn't come for your whistling! I just happened to be passing! But what d' you want?

Tom (cautiously). You step inside, and I'll tell yer. (*Ellen comes in.*) Look 'ere, 'ow 'd you like to git married?

Ellen. Married? Go on! What are you talking about?

Tom. Now don't you go firin' up when a feller only asks you a civil question! What I says is—'Ow 'd you like to git married?

Ellen. Depends who it was. But it's no concern o' yours.

Tom. That's as may be. . . . There's the baker's young man,—so I've 'eard—

Ellen (with contempt). 'Im? He's a poor sawney, he is, and, so I've told him many's the time!

Tom. Ow! (*grinning*). Then p'raps you'd sooner 'ave *me* than *'im*, if I was to be *'ad*, so to speak!

Ellen. Well, I should *think* so. You are a *man*, anyways, whatever else you ain't, and *he* ain't much better than a turnip!

Tom (drawing nearer). Look you 'ere, my dear. 'Ow would you like to be called in Church to-morrer, along o' me?

Ellen (much startled). What? *Me*? Along o' *you*? whatever do you mean?

Tom. Jus' what I say. My banns is goin' to be called to-morrer, an' Mary Ann's ain't,—not if I knows it.

Ellen. Well, I never!

Tom. It's as true as I stand 'ere. There's goin' to be another name than 'ers called along o' mine, an' if you'd like it to be *your* name, say the word, me dear!

Ellen. Well, I never! And whatever'd Mary Ann say?

Tom. That's neither 'ere nor there. I makes you an offer, an' you takes it or leaves it,—see? But I ain't got no time to spare argyin' over it, so speak up, quick, Ellen. (*Picks up hat.*) If you won't, there's bound to be them as will.

Ellen. Ah! I daresay that's true enough. . . . Well,—(*with a coy giggle*). I'll take you, Tom, but, lor', I do feel all of a tremble. (*Leans up against chair.*)

Tom. Come on, now;—you just pull yourself together, my girl, and *mum's the word*. (*Jerks thumb over shoulder.*) They won't know we ain't been thinkin' on it this long while. There's yer missis comin', you'd best get away quick. . . . 'Ere!

Ellen. Oh, go on!

Tom. Yes, 'ere!!

Ellen. Oh! go on! (*Hasty embrace, and Ellen hurries out at door R. Tom seats himself carefully on chair L. and assumes a stolid appearance. Enter Mrs. Brown.*)

Mrs. Brown. Well, Jones! (*Jones gets up.*) I trust you have come to a suitable decision. (*Smothered giggle from Ellen outside.*)

Tom (passing his hand over his mouth). Yes, mum. You'll kindly tell the Vicar that I want my banns called termorrer same as arranged.

Mrs. Brown. I'm thankful to hear it. I felt sure you *would* think better of it.

Tom (fervently). I 'ave, mum. (*Goes towards door R.*)

Mrs. Brown. Good! Then you've made up your mind to be true to Mary Ann?

Tom (at door). Well, mum, I *am* goin' to be called, but it ain't with Mary Ann. It's with Ellen, mum, your 'ousemaid. Good mornin', mum.

(*Exit, leaving Mrs. Brown shocked and horrified.*)

CURTAIN.

THE TOOLIP.

A DUOLOGUE.

Characters :—

Elizabeth Erle } each occupying an alms-
Thomas Blythe } house on the Riven estate.

Time : Present day.

Scene : Elizabeth's living-room.

Scene I : time, about eleven o'clock on a winter morning.

Scene II : time, about four-thirty p.m. nearly a fortnight later.

SCENE I.

Elizabeth is discovered sweeping ; she opens door L, and sweeps dust out on to path.

Voice without. Marnin', Lizbeth !

Elizabeth. Marnin', Thomas ! Come in, won't ye ? come in ! an' 'ave a crack wi' me.

(Enter Thomas.)

Thomas. *(He puts stick in corner L, and comes forward rubbing his hands.)* Well, an' 'ow be you this cold marnin' ?

Elizabeth *(leaning on broom).* Ah ! the cold do get into my pore old bones somethin' crool. An' what wi' that, an' me bad sight, an' not bein' able to git about easy, I'm in a

bad way, I am. . . . Sit ye down, Thomas, sit ye down. (*Hobbles over to corner to put away broom.*) But there! I can't expect nothin' different at my age. An' 'ow be you feelin'?

Thomas (sits). Pretty middlin'! pretty middlin'! I don't get no younger, neither! An' 'ow's the toolip goin' on?

Elizabeth (shaking her head). Ah! it don't grow as well as I'd 'oped for, an' I'm bitter disapp'int'! Yours'll be the best un after all, though it didn't look near so promisin' as mine at the start. (*She picks up a duster and limps about the room dusting while she talks.*)

Thomas. But you ain't seen my toolip this long while, so 'ow are you to know it's better nor yourn? You don't know nothin' about it, whether it be or it baint!

Elizabeth. That I do, then! Baker was tellin' me only this marnin' what a fine up-standin' flower yours were.

Thomas (contemptuously). Baker! I never 'eard as 'e knowed aught about flowers, except the sorts 'is bread's made on!

Elizabeth. Ay, Thomas! you was always such a one for your joke.

Thomas. An' what's more, I don't believe 'e's ever clapped eyes on my toolip. 'Owever, anyways I'll take care to put it where no one *can* see it, this very day. But I doubt 'e was just tryin' to get a rise out o' you.

Elizabeth. No, no, 'e's ketched a sight o' your plant some'ow or other. An' 'e says to me, 'e says:—"Old Master Blythe's toolip ull lick yourn all to fits," 'e says, "if it go on as well as it begun." Them was 'is very words, the impident feller!

Thomas (thoughtfully). Ah! Was they indeed?

Elizabeth. They was. (*Stands still facing Thomas.*) Ah, Thomas, it ain't that I grudge you the prize. It's only—only—(*clasps her duster with a tragic gesture*) that—I'd so dearly love to 'ave it meself!

Thomas. Well, it's early days talkin'; there's a longish bit o' time yet awhile afore the show, an' your plant may come on to be finer nor mine for all we know. Let's 'ave a look at it. (*He gets up, and goes to table in corner R.*) Lor! but it do look peaky, don't it? Still, there's plenty o' time,—plenty o' time. Very like that'll be a proper 'andsome flower afore it's done.

Elizabeth (dismally). Oh, yes! maybe it will, when it's too late to be any good, an' someone else 'as took the prize. That'll be just my luck; an' only what I ought to look for.

Thomas (turning round). Well, you surprise me, Lizbeth, you do. You're a fairly sensible woman mostly, as women go, take you altogether, an' I never thought you'd be that set on a bit of a prize.

Elizabeth (sharply). Well, an' 'ow about you? Ain't you set on it yourself?

Thomas (rubbing his head). Maybe I am, come to think on it. But I never reckoned some'ow as you'd care much, one way or the other.

Elizabeth. Then you're just out; I *do* care. Eh! but carin' won't git me the prize, I know that well enough. An' I know I'd ought to be use' to disapp'intments by this time, seein' what a-many I've 'ad to bear (*Takes duster to door, and shakes it out.*) Ay deary me! that I 'ave, then. But I'd such a wonderful fancy to git this 'ere prize, for I've never got one yet in all my born days!

Thomas. Well, that's more nor I can say, ain't it? Recollec' me gettin' a prize for runnin' when I were a young lad? Ay, bless yer! seems as if I could 'ear the cheerin' an' all now! . . . D'ye mind, Lizbeth?

Elizabeth. Yes, o' course I mind. Red as a turkey-cock you was an' looked fit to bust, as one may say. An' that set up you was too, as if no-one 'ad ever won a prize afore.

Thomas. Well, well! that's the way o' young lads, ye see. An' the way of old uns too, seemin'ly, for I won't deny I'd be proper proud if I *did* get 'is lordship's prize for the toolip. I've watched an' tended that there flower, same as if it was a child!

Elizabeth (with irritation). Oh! you

needn't be worryin' yourself, Thomas; you always *was* lucky. You'll git the prize, most like. Anyways, if you don't, it won't be me as *will*, that's all *I* know! I never did 'ave no luck, never; an' I'm sure I dunno whyever I should 'ave expected to begin now, at my time o' life.

Thomas. Choo! choo! Don't talk so ridic'lus, Lizbeth. To 'ear you go on, anybody'd think all the parish was competin' against you, instead of only the other alms-houses. You'd ought to 'ave more sense.

Elizabeth. Well, you needn't be so sharp on a body.

Thomas. *Sharp!* Stuff an' nonsense! An' another thing I can tell you, there's only you an' me in the runnin'. (*Jerks thumb over shoulder.*) Them two old bodies won't 'ave nothin' fit to show, an' they knows it. But, bless yer! *they* ain't worrying theirselves, not they! You know 'is lordship promised to give a somethin' to them as didn't win the prize. Maybe you'd forgotten that, Lizbeth?

Elizabeth. No, I ain't forgot nothin'. But 'oo wants a *somethin'*? That's not the same thing as gettin' the prize!

Thomas. More it ain't. But it's next door to it, an' better than nothin'.

Elizabeth. That's as folk may think. . . . No, I'd set me 'eart on that there prize, an' I ain't a-goin' to git it, an' I'll never 'ave another chance, not at my age. (*Mournfully.*)

I doubt I'll never see another winter, Thomas ; never another winter.

Thomas (cheerfully). Go on ! You told us that last year, an' the year before that, an' the year afore that, too ! God willin' you'll see plenty o' winters yet, if only you'll pluck up a bit o' sperrit !

Elizabeth. No, no ! I ain't long for this world. I'm sure I ain't.

Thomas. That's all gammon. If you was to give over frettin' an' worrittin' about every trifle you'd be a different woman in a week.

Elizabeth (turning upon him). An' if you was to give over preachin' an' lecturin' your betters, it 'ud be a blessin' ! Ain't it enough that you should 'ave all the luck, without 'oldin' forth that way to them as aren't so fortnit ? You leave me be, Thomas Blythe, an' mind your own consarns, an' I'll mind mine !

Thomas. Bless the woman ! 'Ow she do fly out, to be sure ! But you didn't ought to turn nasty, Lizbeth, for I'm only speakin' for your own good. You let things reg'lar get on your nerves, an' worry an' fuss over 'em till it seems like you can't get no pleasure out o' nothin'. It don't matter what it is—that there old toolip, or anythin' else that comes 'andy ;—you must go an' make a trouble of it.

Elizabeth (solemnly). Ah ! we can't git past our natures, Thomas, an' I'm one o'

those as 'as a *feelin' eart*,—a very feelin' 'eart. It's the feelin' 'eart that wears a body out.—An' I'm a bit *extry* queer to-day, just same as if I was goin' to be ill again, an' whatever 'ud become of my pore toolip then, I'd like to know?

Thomas (slowly). I dunno. I dunno, I'm sure.

Elizabeth (turning away, and fidgeting with the things on the dresser or table for a few seconds). Well, then, I do. (*Pause; then she goes on in a shaky voice.*) Stands to reason—I'd lose—me last—bit o' chance (*puts apron surreptitiously up to her eyes.*) if I was—laid by, an' couldn't—look to the plant.

Thomas (in astonishment). Well, I'm blest! If you ain't *cryin'* for that there old prize!

Elizabeth (with an indignant sob, not turning round). *Cryin'*? (*Sniff.*) Me *cryin'*? (*Sniff.*) Whatever 'ull you say next, I wonder? But I'm a bit upset this mornin', one way an' another, an' all of a tremble-like. Leave me be, an' get ye gone, Thomas.

Thomas. Yes, I'd best be goin'. (*Goes to door, and picks up stick*). An' don't you be so down'earted, my girl. 'Try an' pluck up a bit o' sperrit, as I says just now, an' see what that'll do for ye.

Elizabeth (wiping her eyes). Get ye gone!
. . . Get ye gone! (*Thomas stands*

looking at her ; is about to speak, but thinks better of it, and goes slowly out, looking back as he goes. Elizabeth weeps silently.)

CURTAIN.

SCENE II.

(Elizabeth is asleep in her armchair, her feet up on another chair, and a blanket over her. Door L is very cautiously opened, and Thomas's head appears round it ; he looks about, then comes softly in, pushing the door carefully to behind him. He crosses the room on tiptoe—keeping a wary eye on Elizabeth—to the table in corner R., takes from inside his coat a pot containing a fine pink tulip, and deposits it on the table. He then picks up the very weedy-looking tulip plant already there, surveys it with many grimaces and shakes of the head, tucks it inside his coat, noiselessly retraces his steps, and exit, shutting the door very quietly. Elizabeth snores slightly. (Pause.) Knock at door ; there is no reply, and knock is repeated more loudly. Elizabeth stirs, opens her eyes, and calls out feebly,) “ Come in. ! ”

(Enter Thomas).

Thomas (innocently). It's only me, Lizbeth. I jus' stepped round to ask 'ow you was.

Elizabeth. Not much to boast on! But I'm better; oh, yes, a sight better, thank ye kindly.

Thomas (drawing up chair RC). That's right,—I see Nurse goin' by just now, an' she says you're doin' fine, an' she ain't comin' no more.

Elizabeth. No, she ain't comin' no more; she's gone back to Setford. I can scaggle along by myself now. Eh! but it's been a weary time, it 'as indeed. Why, 'ow long is it since you was in 'ere last, Thomas?

Thomas. Well, now, 'ow long *would* it be?

Elizabeth. Goin' on for a fortnight, I do believe! That's a goodish while, ain't it?

Thomas. Ay, a goodish while. An' did Nurse tell you what a fine plant your toolip 'ad growed? I told 'er to be suren to; I thought it 'ud 'earten you up a bit.

Elizabeth (brightening). Yes, she told me; she said it 'ad growed a real beauty, an' gettin' 'andsomer every day. But she wouldn't let me see it; she said I didn't ought to be excited.

Thomas. An' she was quite right; I should say she'd a deal o' sense, that woman. But I 'spose there's no objection to your seein' it now you're better?

Elizabeth. No, not now there ain't. I'm lookin' forward to that. You go an' 'ave a look at it first.

Thomas (getting up). Rightyer are, my girl.

(*He crosses to table R. and picks up tulip.*) Why, Lizbeth! it's a *grand* flower;—some-thin' splendid! You'd ought to be right down proud of it. Grand, it is, an' no mistake.

Elizabeth. Well, I'm glad o' that. But t'isn't much use if other folks' is grander.

Thomas. Ah! this 'ere 'ud take a lot o' beatin'. Why, it's more like a great rose nor anythin'; an' ain't it a *colour*! Blest if it won't take the shine out o' all the flowers at the show!

Elizabeth. Ah! you be very kind to praise up my toolip like that, Thomas,—very kind you be. But I doubt we'll 'ear a different tale when we see yourn an' mine together.

Thomas (putting down plant). Oh! Do you, now? Well, that's as may be. But I knows a good flower when I sees it, an' this 'ere——

Elizabeth (interrupting impatiently). There! the kettle's bilin'. P'raps you'll wet the tea for me, an' save me movin'. You means well, Thomas, I know that—very well, you means, but I've 'ad enough o' that toolip. It may be good, but it ain't the best, an' I don't want to talk about it no more.

Thomas. Just as you please, my dear! (*He makes tea.*)

Elizabeth. You'd best stop an' 'ave a cup o' tea with me. The milk'll be outside, an' the bread is yonder. (*Thomas looks about*

vaguely.) There, man! right before you, as plain as the nose on your face. Bless me! what 'elpless critters men are!

Thomas (sturdily). That they ain't. An' anyways, where would you be without 'em? tell me that! (*Puts bread on table.*) Lor! the world 'ud be a dull place, wi' nowt but a pack o' females clackin' together!

Elizabeth. A deal better nor if it were all men, drinkin' an' quarrelin' an' goin' on! There's the butter, Thomas, can't ye see? an' the knives close to it an' all. Lark-a-daisy me! whatever was your eyes put in your yead for?

Thomas. Ah! If I was to make as good use o' my eyes as you do o' your tongue, I'd do well enough, wouldn't I? There ye are, then. (*Puts knives and butter on table E.*) An' now for that there milk. (*Goes to door and takes in milk jug.*)

Elizabeth. An' there's a pot o' jam on there what was sent down from the 'All. I couldn't eat it when I were ill, but it done me good to set an' look at it.

Thomas (fetching jam and opening it). Well, that's more nor I can understand. I shouldn' get much satisfaction out o' lookin' at some-thin' I couldn't eat, not me! But the female seck,—well, they're past understandin' by a plain man. I give up the job a long while ago. (*He arranges rest of tea things.*)

Elizabeth. An' the best thing you could do.

We wasn't never meant to understand one another,—only to put up with each other as best as we could! Now sit ye down, do, Thomas; don't go fidgetin' round no more.

(Thomas sits, and they begin tea. Thomas looks round at tulip.)

Thomas. Ah! that there toolip o' yourn, I can't 'elp talkin' of it, Lisbeth; it does my 'eart good to look at it. An' only three days to the show—only three days!

Elizabeth (curtly.) I dessay. It don't matter much to me when it is, for I ain't goin'.

Thomas. Ain't goin'? Why, it's only a step, an' you'll be well enough, Nurse said.

Elizabeth. Maybe. But I ain't goin'.

Thomas. Oh, yes! you'd best go; I could take you round in the chair.

Elizabeth. You could; but I'll not trouble you. I'd git tired an' put about all for nowt, an' I'm best at home.

Thomas. No, you ain't. It'd do you a power o' good to get out among the folks, an' see the flowers an' all. A long way better for you than to set at 'ome mopin'.

Elizabeth. An' 'oo says I'd be mopin'?

Thomas. I says it, an' knows it. An' you knows it too.

Elizabeth. I don't know nothin' of the kind. If a body what ain't been well 'as a fancy to set quiet in 'er own 'ome, can't she do it, without anyone passin' remarks?

Thomas (impressively). If a body 'asn't got the sense to know 'er own luck, well, someone else 'as got to p'int it out to 'er, that's all!

Elizabeth. I dunno what you mean. If you was to speak out plain maybe I'd understand you.

Thomas. Maybe you would. Well then, look you 'ere. *You're a-goin' to get that there prize, as sure as I'm settin' on this chair!*

Elizabeth (eagerly, grasping the arms of her chair). *Thomas! I ain't!*

Thomas. That you are, then. Now don't go an' get excited, but set quiet, an' I'll bring you the toolip so as you can see for yourself.

Elizabeth. Why, I can't 'ardly believe it. Sure you're not makin' fun on me, Thomas?

Thomas (with fine indignation, as he gets up). *What?* Me tell you you was goin' to get the prize when you wasn't? Ain't you known me, boy an' man, all my life, and you think——

Elizabeth (hastily). No, no. I don't think nothin' at all. But you know your plant was finer nor mine at one time.

Thomas (crosses to table R.). Well, an' what if it was? That's not to say as it'll stop so, is it? Why, bless me! there's no two ways about it. This is the finest toolip ever I see! Look-a-there, my girl; if that don't satisfy you I dunno what would. Ain't it a beauty, now, just about? *(He puts it before her.)*

Elizabeth (*admiringly*). My! ain't it, then? Yes, I reckon it's the 'andsomest I ever seen. An' you're *sure* yours isn't 'andsomer, if you was to tell truth?

Thomas (*dramatically*). Now just 'ark to the woman! Didn't I say two minutes ago as *that* was the finest toolip ever I see?

Elizabeth (*nodding her head*). Ay, you did—you did.

Thomas. Then what are you talking about? *My toolip finer than that?* Well, it ain't, an' I *never spoke a truer word!*

Elizabeth. Well I never! It do seem wonderful mine should a' turned out the best after all. But you took a deal o' trouble over yours, Thomas; I dessay it's a good flower, too.

Thomas. I dessay it is. An' I dessay you'd like to 'ave a look at it! Well, I've no objections; seein's believin', so they say; I'll fetch it along. You bide quiet till I come back. (*Exit.*)

(*Elizabeth fumbles for her spectacles, slowly puts them on, and peers closely at the tulip, with admiring ejaculations.*)

(*Re-enter Thomas carrying tulip.*)

Thomas. Well, Lizbeth, 'ere you are. (*He puts it down beside the other.*) What do you think o' that?

Elizabeth. Why, Thomas, oo'd 'a thought it? it ain't *near* so fine! You was quite right.

Thomas. Quite right? O' course I was quite right. Not much doubt which'll get the prize, is there?

Elizabeth. No, that's true enough. But you're disapp'inted, Thomas, I'm afeared.

Thomas (loudly). *Disapp'inted?* Not me; I've got more sense. I'm a reasonable man, I am.

Elizabeth. Well, I'm real glad you don't mind. . . . Just fancy me gettin' a prize after all, at my time o' life! Ah! I'm a 'appy woman this day.

Thomas. That's good news, that is. An' when I goes to the show, as you ain't goin', I'll be sure an' bring you word what all the folks says about your fine toolip. (*With a sigh, picking up the plant.*) Ay, they'll be crowdin' round it as thick as bees, admirin' of it.

Elizabeth (with pride). That they will. (*Pause; then, insinuatingly*) Thomas, I ope' you didn't think me ongrateful, did you?

Thomas (startled, but cautious). Ongrateful? What for?

Elizabeth. Why, about you takin' me to the show.

Thomas. Oh! no. I dunno as I did, not perticler. Why?

Elizabeth. 'Cause I was just thinkin'—p'raps it wouldn't be *right* for me to stop away, if I was anyways able to go. An' I like to do what's right; specially after learnin' the lesson I 'ave this day!

Thomas. An' what might that be?

Elizabeth. Why, that them as is 'umble, an'

don't expect nothin', *does* git their deserts now an' again, *in spite o' everybody!* (*She nods her head defiantly.*)

Thomas (*drily*). Ah! *In spite o' everybody!*

Elizabeth. Yes. (*Draws the small tulip towards her.*) But it don't prevent me bein' sorry as your toolip should 'a turned out such a pore measly object, though I *am* proud o' mine bein' so big an' fine. . . . Why, it don't seem no time since it was only jus' above ground, an'—so's I might see 'ow fast it growed,—I tied a bit o' green wool round it, as it might be 'ere. Why,—why!—whatever's this? 'Ere *is* the wool! . . . no, it can't be, for this is *your* toolip! . . . Yes, it *is* though, I do believe, the very same bit o' wool!

Thomas (*all taken aback*). *Bit o' wool?* Nonsense, there ain't no wool! 'Ere, give us 'old, Lizbeth, for I've got to be goin'—d'ye 'ear? (*He seizes pot, but Elizabeth clutches it desperately, and retains it.*)

Elizabeth (*unwinding and holding up a tail of green wool*). *Ain't no wool?* What d'you call that, then?

Thomas. I dunno; just nothin',—some-thin' as caught in it, I s'pose. Give us 'old, quick; I can't stop no longer.

Elizabeth. I reckon you'll 'ave to stop till we've 'ad this out. You've got to explain this 'ere wool.

Thomas (trying to collect his wits). I—I—I don't know why ever you're makin' a fuss! Why shouldn't I 'ave tied a bit o' wool round, too?

Elizabeth. I dunno why you *shouldn't*, but I know you *didn't*, or you'd 'a said so afore!

Thomas. Well, you jumped on me so sudden-like, I didn't 'ardly know what I *was* sayin',—that's all! Now give us the toolip, Lizbeth, without no more nonsense, for I want to go 'ome.

Elizabeth (shaking her head). No, no, Thomas, you ain't a-goin' 'ome yet awhile,—you listen to *me*. This 'ere is *my* toolip.

Thomas. You've no call to think so.

Elizabeth. I don't think it, I knows it. You *changed 'em*! I dunno 'ow you done it, or *when* you done it, but you *done* it. You *changed 'em*!

Thomas (cornered). *Changed 'em?*

Elizabeth. Yes, *changed 'em*.

Thomas (helplessly). *Changed 'em?*

Elizabeth. Yes; *changed 'em*! What do you want to go sayin' my words after me for, same as a parrot?

Thomas (dully repeating). Parrot?

Elizabeth. Yes; *parrot*! Now, look you 'ere, Thomas Blythe. You're a good man, an' a kind man, an' you done a thing for me as I wouldn't 'a done for you; I owns it. But Elizabeth Erle ain't the woman to take what don't belong to 'er, whether it's a prize

or the credit o' gettin' it, or anythin' else. So 'ere's your toolip (*she pushes the big one towards him*), an' if ever a man deserved a prize, it's you, Thomas.

Thomas (*earnestly*). I—don't want it, Lizbeth; I'd sooner things stopped as they was. Prizes an' that is more to a female than they is to a man when all's said. An' if it 'adn't been for that there old dratted bit o' wool, you'd never have found out.

Elizabeth (*slowly getting out of her chair*). Maybe not. But I'm glad I *did* find out, for it wouldn't 'ave been fair nor right. . . . No, no; you take your toolip—(*she puts it, with a shaky hand into his*)—an' your prize when the time come,—an' my blessin' with 'em! An' p'raps—you was right—(*puts her hand on his arm*)—an' I'll live to see another winter after all.

Thomas (*patting her hand*). Ay! An' maybe win a prize yet!

CURTAIN.

WRONG AGAIN!

A DUOLOGUE.

Characters :—

Mrs. Stiggins, an old woman.

Mrs. Evans, a buxom young widow.

(They are next-door neighbours.)

Scene :—

The yard, or the kitchen, of Mrs. Evan's cottage.

When curtain rises Mrs. Evans is blacking a pair of shoes.

Enter Mrs. Stiggins, slowly, leaning on stick.

Mrs. Stiggins. Marnin', Mis' Evans!

Deary-me! it be quite chilly, that it be.

Mrs. Evans. No, it ain't; not to anyone as 'as work to do to keep' em warm. It's standin' about haverin' an' gossiping that chills the blood in a body's veins. (*Brushes shoe vigorously.*) Chilly! . . . there's some folks must always be grumblin'.

Mrs. Stiggins. I warn't grumblin'! I only passed a remark, an' you go an' take me up! . . . I'll tell ye what it is, Mis' Evans, it ain't good for ye to live all alone. It gits on yer nerves, an' sets ye all on edge, like.

Mrs. Evans (contemptuously). Go along with you! It don't do nothing of the sort. I've got no time for nerves an' that, thanks be. *Nerves!* Pack o' rubbish, *I call 'em!*

Mrs. Stiggins. Don't tell me! When folks 'as lived all alone along o' their selves some while, they gets that erritable that nothing can't go right wi' 'em. You didn't ought to live alone no more, mark me!

Mrs. Evans. Well, *I'm* the best judge o' that, and I like me own company best, thank you, *Mrs. Stiggins.*

Mrs. Stiggins. That's easy said, when ye 'aven't got no other! I'm sure my Tom has said to me—time and agen, he's said, "Laws! Mother, 'ow precious lonely Mis' Evans must be all alone by 'erself!"

Mrs. Evans (scornfully). *Tom!* Very kind of Tom, I'm sure, but he's quite *wrong*, and so you can tell him. Not that there's anything wonderful in *that*, for he's never right!

Mrs. Stiggins. Well, there now! ain't it true what I say, how erritable ye do get livin' all by yerself?

Mrs. Evans. I'd get a deal more erritable livin' with anyone else! And as for Tom, if he was to mind his own consarns, it 'ud be better for all on us. But there! (*collects shoes, brushes, etc.*) I can't stop chafferin' 'ere about Tom all day. I've got me washin' to do. (*Clatters off noisily.*)

Mrs. Stiggins (looking after her, and solemnly shaking her head). Lark-a-daisy me : —Lark-a-daisy me !—

(*Re-enter Mrs. Evans, carrying a basket of clothes. She dumps it down, keeping her back turned to Mrs. Stiggins, and takes out the clothes, shaking them before hanging them on the line ; doing all with ostentatious hurry and bustle.*)

Mrs. Stiggins. Bless the woman ! What a mortal 'urry ye do be in !

Mrs. Evans (ungraciously, over her shoulder). Oh ! you're still there, are you ?

Mrs. Stiggins. Ay ! I'm 'ere right enough —'Ow ye do slave yerself *to* be sure ! You'll not live to be as old as me, without you take a bit o' rest now an' agen.

Mrs. Evans (tartly). Well. there ain't no particler sense as *I* can see in livin' to be so wonderful old, an' dependin' on your relations. (*Pegs more garments on the line.*) Them little black folks, pigmies as they call 'em, what was brought over from foreign parts,—when they gets a bit wobbly, and past their work, they jest climbs up the tallest tree, and chucks theirselves down ! *They* don't 'old with livin' on for ever and ever, and bein' a burden on their families, *they* don't !

Mrs. Stiggins. More shame to 'em ! We was put 'ere by Them Above, and 'ere we'd ought to bide till our time come. They black 'eathen don't know no better, bein'

dwarfs an' all, but we didn't ought to go by *them*.

Mrs. Evans. I don't go by nobody but meself—An' I always does what's *right*.

Mrs. Stiggins. I dunno as you do. If you done what was right, to *my* way o' thinkin', you'd take an' marry my Tom, when ye know 'e's that set on it. . . . 'Stead o' that, ye just treat 'm like the dirt under yer feet, an' yet e' don't drink, nor 'e don't swear, an' 'e'll set as quiet over the fire of an evenin' as my old tabby. Ay! set there, 'e will, by the hour together, never doin' nothin' at all. . . . Ye don't see a man like that, not *every* day o' the week!

Mrs. Evans (*standing defiantly, arms akimbo*) A *man*! Well, there! Some folks 'as one notion of what's a man, an' some 'as another. . . . An' as for marryin',—I've took the marryin' job once, an' maybe that was once too often. (*Business with clothes line.*) An' then,—*Stiggins*! Whoever 'eard the like o' such a ungodly name! Maybe *you're* used to it, seein' you've 'ad it such a time an' all, but it ain't one *I'd* care to put me pen to. . . . *Stiggins*! . . . I reckon *Evans* is good enough for me.

Mrs. Stiggins. Deary me! You're mighty particler, you be. One name's as good as another, an' anyways it ain't worth worrittin' over.

Mrs. Evans. Maybe not, if it was the *only*

thing to take objection to, but it ain't, not by a long way.—But there! we've 'ad enough o' Tom; I've got me work to think of.

Mrs. Stiggins. O' course I know you fretted a bit for your first, but you know 'is ways an' tempers was terrible trying, an' Tom 'ud make a nice change for ye.

Mrs. Evans. H'mm!

Mrs. Stiggins. A second wife or 'usband may 'ave their faults, but they're bound to be different to the first one's, so a body's more ready to put up wi' 'em. Ay! dear! but my Tom knows well enough ye'll never take 'im. Only this marnin' 'e says it, "an' maybe," 'e says, "it's out o' respekt for pore old Sam Evans," 'e says.

Mrs. Evans (sharply). Then it ain't nothin' of the kind. My Sam says to me many a time, "Mary," 'e says, "Don't think nothin' about me when I'm dead an' gorn," 'e says, "but take another 'usband if it suits your mind," 'e says.

Mrs. Stiggins. Ah! poor Sam! did he, now? I reckon 'e knew you'd suit your mind, whether or no! 'E warn't no fool, Sam warn't. But 'e'd a tidy sharp tongue of 'is own, same as you 'ave yerself. Tom always said you was bound to be cat and dog together.

Mrs. Evans (with heat). Tom's bound to be wrong, if 'e gives his opinion about anything in this blessed world. 'E's *always* wrong, an'

always 'as been, an' always *will* be! (*Puts peg into her mouth.*)

Mrs. Stiggins (*acidly*). An' I s'pose 'e thinks it 'ud be nice to 'ave a piece o' perfection same as you 'andy, to set 'im right all the while!

Mrs. Evans (*her mouth full of clothes-pegs*). That's—that's—(*removes peg*) just about what 'e *do* think!

Mrs. Stiggins. Well, there! I call it downright onnatural for a body to think so much of 'erself as what you do!—(*with malice*) But I dessay it makes up to you a bit for not bein' most *other* folks' fancy!

Mrs. Evans (*turning upon her*). An' who says I ain't other folks' fancy? You don't know nothing about it!

Mrs. Stiggins. I've got eyes in me 'ead, an' ears too, an' I use 'em, what's more; an' know 'ow you sets some folks agin you with that tongue o' yours! . . . But I puts it down to your workin' so 'ard, day in an' day out; a little rest 'ud make a different woman on ye. . . . Tom often says ye'd be twice the woman ye be, if you'd take a bit of a 'oliday once in a way.

Mrs. Evans. 'Ooliday! I don't want no 'oliday; if folks would let me alone that'd be 'oliday enough for me. What does Tom want to poke 'is nose in for? And e's wrong again, same as usual. What a man it is! 'E couldn't be right if 'e tried. (*Sniffs.*)

'Im and 'is 'olidays! Why can't 'e let me be, that's what *I* want to know!

Mrs. Stiggins. It ain't no good talkin' to you to-day, as I can see. If a body open 'er mouth, you go an' contradict 'er flat!

Mrs. Evans (sharply). No, I don't! I don't do nothin' o' the sort!

Mrs. Stiggins. That you do, then, an' I'm getting sick on it. There! it's gone twelve; I must go an' see after Tom's bit o' dinner. (*Gets up, helping herself with her stick.*) An, look you 'ere, Mis' Evans, I ain't sure now but what Tom's a fool to go wantin' you for 'is wife an' all. (*Nods her head spitefully.*)

Mrs. Evans (smiling). Ah! Tom knows which side 'is bread is buttered! 'E ain't got *much* sense, but 'e's got enough for that.

Mrs. Stiggins (with rising anger, in a high quavering voice). An' then again, I dunno as I'm so particler anxious as all that to 'ave you for my darter-in-law, an' so I tells ye!—There's plenty I'd sooner see in my place nor you, an' I doubt we're well rid on ye, both on us.

Mrs. Evans (smiling more broadly, as she picks up basket). Do you, now?

Mrs. Stiggins. That I do. An' if you're thinkin' Tom'll be disappointed anyways, 'e won't, for 'e's knowed it all along. This very day 'e says to me, "Mother," 'e says, "that there woman'll never take me," 'e says.

Mrs. Evans (with another radiant smile).
Then 'e was *wrong again*! And if 'e likes to
come an' see me 'isself, instead of 'iding
be'ind 'is mother's skirts, I'll tell 'im so to 'is
face. Good marnin'!

*(Exit. Mrs. Stiggins remains speechless
and open-mouthed.)*

CURTAIN.

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